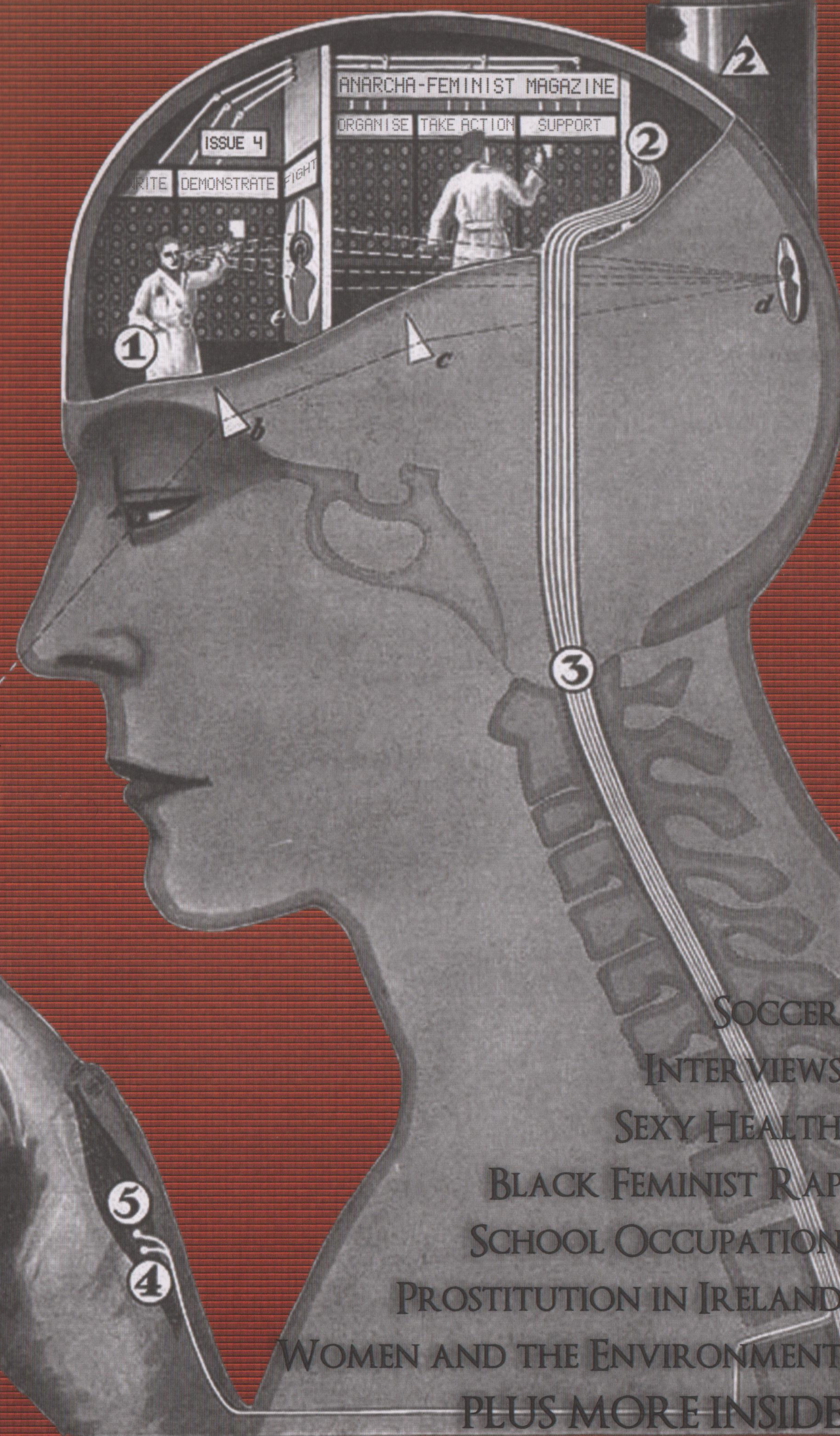


THE RAG
IS A MAGAZINE PRODUCED BY A DIVERSE
GROUP OF ANARCHA-FEMINIST WOMEN IN DUBLIN.
WE ARE ALL FEMINISTS, UNITED IN OUR RECOGNITION
THAT WOMEN'S SUBORDINATION EXISTS. OUR STRUGGLE
NEEDS TO BE FOUGHT ALONGSIDE THE STRUGGLE AGAINST OTHER
FORMS OF OPPRESSION, NOT TREATED AS AN AFTERTHOUGHT OR AS
A DISTRACTION. WE ARE ALL ANARCHISTS, UNITED IN OUR BELIEF FOR
THE NEED TO CREATE ALTERNATIVES TO THIS CAPITALIST, PATRIARCHAL
SOCIETY WHEREIN MOST ARE DOMINATED AND EXPLOITED.

the RAG

Issue 4



Introduction

Welcome to The Rag #4, Ireland's favourite anarchy-feminist magazine!

The magazine in your hands and the articles it contains are a result of inspiring discussions, careful research, personal experience, commitment, and lots of hard work. We are a collective of anarchy-feminists who believe that all people deserve equality, freedom, and a decent standard of living. In these pages we hope to present some of our experiences, our passions, our influences, and our concerns.

In this issue we revisit topics surrounding our bodies and health. Prostitution, sex work, and trafficking are explored alongside women's participation in science, women smoking, and handy tips to survive single parenthood. We have also been busy carrying out interviews. In this issue we speak with two traveller women, some members of a Danish punk band, an advocate for sex workers, and Irish artist Áine Macken. We are also delighted in this issue to be publishing our first contribution article from two amazing Glaswegian anarchy-feminists about the occupation of a school in Glasgow.

In Ireland, overall unemployment has almost doubled to 12% over the past year (under-25s accounting for 43% of the decline in employment in the most recent period). More people are starting to realise that we cannot trust the politicians, the developers, the bankers, and that capitalism is a doomed enterprise. Together with our anarchist comrades we need to fight the cutbacks imposed on ordinary people, to organise together and to present a vision of a sustainable future based on mutuality, cooperation, and equality. Revolution can be brought about through revolutionary actions. As a collective, we discuss and develop our ideas, we write, and we grow. As individuals and collectively, we attempt to challenge established oppressive social relations while we struggle to change and improve the world around us, where we live and where we work.

The anarchist movement feels alive and spreading at the moment in Ireland and elsewhere. We admire the political organising of anarchist groups such as the WSM. We also commend the work of the many community gardens in Dublin, Seomra Spraoi, and the new Soupstone Kindergarten – while these initiatives are not an end in themselves they offer us a glimpse of how some alternative social interactions can work.

This year saw the launch of another Irish feminist publication, Lash Back. This was the result of the hard work put in by its collective – a fantastic group who are deeply committed to feminism, social justice, and having loads of fun.

We extend solidarity and respect to all the anarchy-feminist collectives recently emerged in the UK – in London and in Glasgow – and to the Brighton Health Collective that has been a continual inspiration for us. We applaud the initiative and brave action of the No Pretence group at the Anarchist Movement Conference 2009. To all women working for freedom, we send you our love and solidarity.

If you are organising an anarchy-feminist event or have a group or publication, we'd love to hear from you.

"Coming together is like an explosion of energy" (Selma James). Collectively we access more energy and force than we can individually.

In solidarity and struggle,

RAG

P.S. If you would like to order a copy of The Rag no. 2 or 3 please contact us, details below.

ragdublin@riseup.net
www.ragdublin.blogspot.com
New members welcome!

A big thank you to: All the people who did artwork for us; Seomra Spraoi; Mark Grehan; Monica, Barry, Barra, James, John, Aisling and all at DCTV; Dolphin's Barn Community Garden; Anto Loserdom; AnnaKaisa; Dublin Food Co-op; AnarchistBlackCat.org; organisers of the Belfast, Dublin and London anarchist bookfairs; Choice Ireland; Lashback; Rah; www.grassrootsfeminism.net; WERRC; Sinead; Damo; OpenMute; Housmans; Books Upstairs; Mark T.

cover art uses artwork by Fritz Kahn, 1926.

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RAG MEETING IN SEOMRA



revolutionary
anarchafeminis
group

THE RAG YEAR

Again, it's been a busy but interesting year for RAG. We've gained a number of remarkable new members, who bring with them fresh ideas, perspectives and skills.

We worked with Choice Ireland and Lashback to organise the second annual Feminist Walking Tour in March 2009 for International Women's Day. In February, Marianne and Hilary travelled to speak at a meeting of Norwegian anarchists. A number of ragsters braved the Women's Aid annual fundraiser cycle in May. We brought our RAG distro to the London, Dublin and Belfast anarchist bookfairs, the London Zine Symposium and also to the Dublin Food Co-op on a number of occasions. We enjoyed the chance to give workshops at two anarchist bookfairs (although it can be a tiring experience having to repeatedly defend our choice to be a woman and woman-identified group to some male anarchist comrades).

During the year, we had the fantastic opportunity to make our own RAG television programmes! We produced four shows for the Community in the Studio project arranged by Dublin City Television (DCTV). Check them out on-line the details are below. We welcomed the publication of the new feminist magazine Lash Back and the return of Women's News in Belfast.

We continue to have occasional open meetings on a range of topics. In October, we're screening two films called Abortion Democracy and The Coat Hanger Project. We're working with the WSM and other individuals to co-ordinate the Social Solidarity Network, a response the on-going cuts imposed on us by the government.

Details of the RAG/DCTV programmes:

1. Social Centres: <http://www.vimeo.com/4607329>
2. RAG and DIY publishing: <http://www.vimeo.com/4607329>
3. Feminist Walking Tour of Dublin: <http://www.vimeo.com/5820021>
4. Community Gardens: <http://www.vimeo.com/6161194>



DRUNK GRANNY ROCK OUT
LAUNCH THE RAG No.3



FEMINIST WALKING TOUR CREW (2009)



RAGSTERS WINTER 2008



A WALKING TOUR MEETING



GOLD HOT PANTS!



LAUNCH OF THE RAG No. 3

REVOLUTIONARY FOOTBALL



WORDS BY CLODAGH
ARTWORK BY FIONA

Even a fair-weather fan like myself can't fail to be drawn in to the excitement that surrounds certain sporting events or to have respect for the individual involved and their dedication in reaching a particular fitness level. I've been lucky enough to stand in African stadiums during the 2004 African Nations Cup held in Tunisia: North African Muslims, Christians from further south and pasty paddies side-by-side, shouting on the teams and being struck by the universality of football.

Apart from the accessibility of the game (all you require is a street or grass, a ball and goals fashioned from jumpers. Rules, which transcend boundaries of culture and language, can be as basic as: kick ball, back of net) I was interested to learn about other ways football is used to progress positive social change in Ireland and around the world.

Street World Football promotes respect and communication skills through the "Fairplay Football Methodology". The rules are not set in stone, more like scaffolding which can be tweaked and changed as circumstances require. Teams can be mixed genders, rules and scoring decided on by the teams before each game, and no need for a referee because both sides are committed to an honest game. "Players themselves are responsible for calling infringements and resolving any disagreements through dialogue" (FIFA website). What a refreshing change!

While sport can sometimes be the cause of unpleasant rivalry, Street World Football endeavours to foster friendships between the teams competing with each other or, in the case of the Street Football Festival in Foca (Bosnia and Herzegovina) encouraging the youth of former Yugoslavia

to play together on the same team regardless of their ethnic background. More information about this way of playing and upcoming competitions, which generally feature teams from community groups, is contained on the website www.streetfootballworld.org. The groups involved straddle the globe. They use football as a vehicle for AIDS testing/counselling for under 18s in Lesotho, disability rights for amputees in Sierra Leone, and social integration in Germany to mention just a few issues. Another organisation is "Moving the Goalposts" (www.mtgk.org) who use football to try and break the cycle of poverty for young women in Kenya. By providing an alternative social space, young girls can meet and discuss issues that affect them. By becoming confident in one's ability on the pitch, a person can be confident in other areas of their life.

- "Sports Against Racism in Ireland" (sari.ie) promotes social inclusion and cultural integration.
- The Homeless World Cup will be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 2010.

- The Mondiali Antirazzisti (Anti-Racist World Cup) is held every summer near Bologna.
- Another similarly titled Anti-Racism World Cup happens in Belfast.
- Soccer Without Borders - an anarchist soccer tournament was held in Texas in 2009.
- The Easton Cowboys and Cowgirls, a left-leaning Bristol sports club who believe in "freedom through football" have travelled all over the world playing football including a tour of Chiapas and most recently a visit to Sao Paulo to meet Los Autonomos, an anarchist team there.
- Revolutionary Kick-Off - a benefit for Shell To Sea is an annual event since 2008 in Dublin.

The above is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the many associations between football and progressive left-wing politics. Phew! All there's left to say is do a warm-up and get out on the pitch!





Women and the environment

words and image by eve

Between the ages of 23 and 25 I spent the best part of eighteen months of my life living and working on a solidarity camp against a Shell refinery in North Mayo. I recall the still starry morning standing in semidarkness watching the steam from our breaths curl off into the air, exchanging tensed greetings or watching for the procession of Shell trucks winding over the road. Buttoning coats up to the nose against the bitter north Atlantic wind. Had the Shell workers gone in? How many today? Had they encountered problems in the bog? I sat drinking tea with women between the school run and their home help job. Mary brought trays of soda bread and sandwiches doling out endless cups of tea to memorized specifics. Margaret sat bouncing an oblivious two year old on the knee and we listened to the radio reports on Midwest radio or pored over today's article in the Irish times or the mayo echo.

In Shells calculations the extra work these women would have to do; the running to doctors, dispensing medicine, the worry, the looking after, picking up the pieces, didn't count. The pollution of drinking water, destruction of fishing habitat, air pollution- all external costs not to be added to the great calculation of the 'economic benefits' of the project. And in this is one of the biggest flaws of capitalism--the removal of living breathing people from the equation. Instead the abstract notion of economic growth and GDP are lauded and the spurious idea of the 'trickle down' effect trotted out when we ask where the benefits are.

The environment- the natural world - sustains us, is the basis of our existence. People from rural communities who depend on the environment for their livelihood know this more than anyone. The capitalist tenet of limitless growth has resulted in the gross exploitation of the environment of earth and of the bulk of her inhabitants. The idea of limitless economic growth is integral to capitalism. It is an unquestioned certainty. We must produce more and more all the time and if we don't we're in trouble. Whether all this extra crap we produce is of any social value is irrelevant. Oil wells are sunk in the Amazon jungle, ore is gouged from African mines, bloody wars are fought over the raw materials needed to manufacture consumer goods. In the Congo war rages over the control of tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold to sate the demand for mp3 players and mobile phones. In a thousand factories in China migrant women work 16 hour shifts to make Christmas decorations in July.

While some ecofeminist writing has erred on the side of essentialism the linking of women's struggles and environmentalism has proved powerful. For Activist and physicist Vandana Shiva the partnership of feminism and ecology is one of liberation, "a political association that sees that the systems that treat nature as merely raw material also treat women as purely suppliers of labour." Shiva slams the idea of progress and development as defined by the western patriarchal order, the mantra of development trolled out when anyone questions why corporations and governments are allowed to

Could we imagine a time when development means something other than oil refineries, mines, endless shoddy apartment blocks and factories that churn out furry dice and air freshener.

trash the environment and our communities to make a quick buck. For Shiva this is maldevelopment- the accumulation of capital, of (supposed) surplus profit by the creation of poverty and the dispossession. Ultimately it is an extension of the process of colonization "based on the exploitation or exclusion of women, on the exploitation and degradation of the environment and on the exploitation and erosion of other cultures." As the environment has been viewed as a natural resources to be exploited too so have women who globally, do 2/3 of the world's work for 5% of its income - most of our work is unwaged.*

The development brought by Shell is the decimation of the Niger delta: great rusted pipes, compounds secured by arms guards, oil-slicks, oil spills, cancer, asthma, bronchitis. It is overworked women, who, in a deeply patriarchal society are the careers, the food producers. In Africa, women do 60-90% of the agricultural work, Producing 80% of the food consumed. In Erris opponents of the Corrib project were mocked as wanting "to go back to the days of the turf fire and the oil lamp". None of

them bothered to take a look at the community's own development plan which proposed sustainable wind generated energy, cultivation of employment in the fishing and eco tourism sectors allied with a design for provision of services to meet community needs.

The word development has come to stand for any king of shit project they want to force on us. Could we imagine a time when development means something other than oil refineries, mines, endless shoddy apartment blocks and factories that churn out furry dice and air freshener. Of development Shiva says "development refers to the self organised endogenous evolution of an organism, a person, a society...[it] must therefore be based on sovereignty and having the economic and political space for self determination."

On a small scale the Corrib gas project mirrors the pattern that dirty development has taken worldwide. The most marginalized communities without economic or political power are left to deal with the most dirty polluting industries, with disastrous consequences for the communities and the environment that sustains them. In south Africa, the south Durban community and environmental alliance have shown how standards governing pollution are far lower than in Europe. In short the lives of the poor black communities living around the apartheid era Shell and BP refineries are worth less than their European counterparts Women in the global south have been at the forefront of movements against environmental destruction. From the Vandana Shivas activism highlighting biopiracy and the work of Indian tribal women against deforestation to Wangari Maathai's green belt movement in Kenya, both underlining the importance of women in creating meaningful change.

*figures compiled by the Global Women's Strike

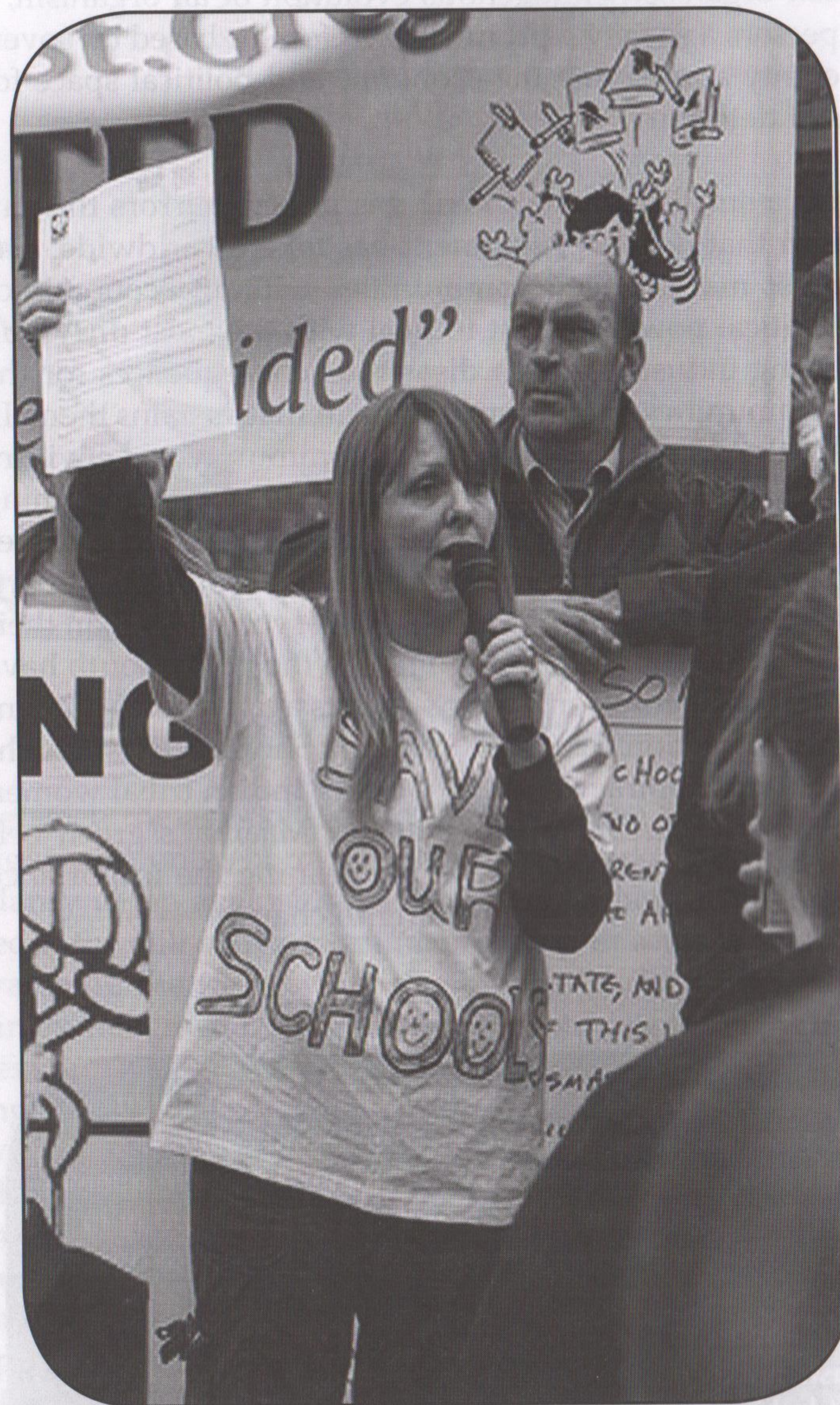


Stock Rant No. 53
Sexist Advertising

I am an ardent admirer of the human body. I delight in all its glorious shaped, gendered, aged, and coloured manifestations. I am an occasional skinny dipper, frequenter of life drawing classes and general supporter of nudity in both public and private. Why then was my response one of disgust to the sudden plastering of Dublin's fair city with billboards of semi-naked ladies? Oiled up, stick thin, breasts barely covered by skimpy bikinis, airbrushed to the hilt "shaking their maracas", the ladies in question were part of a high profile advertisement campaign designed to persuade insecure young men to part with their hard earned cash in exchange for cans of vile smelling body spray. Yes, the Lynx effect. The only effect Lynx has on me is queasiness. It's fucking disgusting. I'd far rather smell a real man. But even more nauseating than their foul spray is the penchant of Lynx & co for grossly sexist, base and demeaning advertising. The images the company used for its most current campaign were more or less soft porn, depicting impossibly idealised, sexually available women. Would you give a nine-year-old a copy of Nuts magazine? If you did what kind of fucked message would you be impressing upon them. The lynx adverts do more or less the same job - but at every bus stop, on every street corner on ten foot tall, full colour billboards. Shake your own fucking maracas.

School occupation - mothers fight back

by Caron and Jain — Glasgow Anarchafeminists



A group of angry parents, mostly mothers and grandmothers, occupied two primary schools in Maryhill, north Glasgow, earlier this year. This was a reaction against Glasgow City Council's announcement, at the beginning of 2009, that it was planning to shut down 13 primary schools and 12 nurseries attended by 2,000 children across the city. In response to these proposals, parents and residents started a 'Save Our Schools' campaign that saw Wyndford and St Gregory's primaries being occupied during the Easter holidays and Wyndford primary again in June by outraged parents determined not to let the closures go ahead. The occupations received a huge amount of support from local anarchists and activists and from people involved in other occupations across the UK, Europe and the rest of the world.

Wyndford and St Gregory's schools are on the Wyndford estate in Maryhill, Glasgow. Years of underinvestment by local government have resulted in a high level of social deprivation in the area, with the catchment area for the schools suffering from high unemployment, drug and health problems and poor quality housing. Despite this, there is a strong community on the estate, made up of residents who are proud to call it their home and who are determined to make it a better place to live. At the heart of the community are its schools - Wyndford Primary, a protestant school, and St Gregory's, a catholic school. The schools adjoin one another and have been working together for years against the sectarianism still prevalent in north Glasgow. As well as winning numerous awards for high achievement, the schools are used extensively by local community groups and provide valuable after-school clubs for the pupils, many of whom come from single-parent families. In April, both schools were occupied for two weeks by parents and supporters. The occupations only ended when the council refused to allow children back to the school once the Easter break had finished if the occupiers didn't leave. Wyndford primary was re-occupied at the start of the summer holidays in June, for 18 days, in further protest and to prevent the council from stripping and demolishing the buildings.

The council claim that the closures are motivated by the dilapidated state of buildings and low pupil numbers. But the real reason is clear - it will save them around £3.7 million per year, a huge saving for a council with large budget deficit. The children affected will be moved to other schools resulting in longer and less safe journeys to and from school and larger class sizes. Parents on low incomes face being forced to pay for after-school care if they can't reach the new schools in time to pick their children up at the end of the school day. The council maintain that they have used criteria such as educational benefit, building capacity and occupancy, transport arrangements and the wider community impact to determine which schools to close. In reality they have picked on schools in poorer areas already ground down by years of underinvestment, social problems and lack of services where they think residents won't fight back. Their plan backfired, as they

"If you take these schools out of our community that leaves a big black hole in Maryhill. If you do that you would be as well taking the rest of us and putting us in the hole too."

-Donna McKenzie

underestimated the strength and determination of the local community, the anger of the parents and the massive amount of support they have locally, nationally and internationally.

The Glasgow schools occupations come during a wave of occupations and strikes across the UK and Ireland. The occupations have mainly been in workplaces, like the Waterford Glass plant, the Prisme factory in Dundee, the Visteon car plants in Enfield and Belfast and the Vestas wind turbine factory on the Isle of Wight. One other school in the UK has been occupied - Lewisham Bridge School in south London - after Lewisham council announced it was planning to demolish it and replace it with a new school run by a private company. Across the UK and Ireland people are fighting back, defying the consequences of global capitalism and the recession with direct action, community and workplace solidarity.

We spoke to three women involved in the Wyndford school occupation, Nikki, Donna and Allison, to find out how they came to take part in the occupation and what effect it had on them and their community.

Glasgow Anarcha-Feminists: How did you get involved in the initial occupation?

Donna: Initially we swithered about doing anything as only a handful of people were involved, but it all worked out. We arranged childcare, raised a bit of money between ourselves and phoned round lots of people. Although we had been planning it for a wee while, the final decision to occupy the school was pretty much made at the last minute. Once we were in the school though everything came together and everyone clubbed together to get a really strong campaign going.

Allison: We were in contact with people planning occupations at other schools in Glasgow, who wanted to wait until the council had made its final decision to act. But we knew we couldn't let the Easter holiday go by without doing anything.

GAF: Had you ever done anything similar before?

Nikki: No, never. It's the sort of thing though where you can't just sit back and do nothing.

Allison: Aye, when it's your kids' lives you feel like you've got to do something.

Donna: I've never known much about politics, but now I know who to trust and who not to trust.

GAF: How did the occupation affect the community?

Donna: It's really brought the community together. Now nobody walks past each other without saying hello. We've started a community council and you see a lot of the same faces there that were involved in the occupation. We're not going to let anything like this happen again here.

Nikki: Now you stop and talk to people you wouldn't have spoken to before. Older people are a lot less isolated, you know more of the local kids. It's brought everyone closer together really.

Allison: Yeah, now when you walk down the street people say 'Oh that's them from the schools!'. It gets people talking to each other, not just those who were involved in the occupation but everyone.

Nikki: I think everyone knows the score with politicians now, knows what they're like. They make all these promises, get their picture in the paper, then behind our backs they do things like this.

Allison: Labour will never get voted in here again, that's for sure. But we don't trust any of the parties - Labour, Lib Dem, whatever, they're all the same.

Donna: We've always had a distrust for the police but now we know the politicians are worse.

Nikki: They're all liars and cheats.

GAF: How did taking part in the occupation affect you personally?

Donna: I think we've realized how strong we are, and how strong a mother's love really is. When it comes to your kids, you'll fight tooth and nail for them and we're living proof of that. You get an enormous sense of pride knowing that you've stood up for your kids. We learnt a lot about ourselves and what we're capable of.

Nikki: Although it was quite scary at first, we've learnt how to stand up for ourselves. It's something to teach the kids as well, that they don't have to put up with this kind of thing, that they can do something about it.

Donna: We experienced every emotion imaginable really.

GAF: Would you do it again?

Nikki: Absolutely. And again. And again!

Allison: It's good to know we've had an impact. Even if we didn't win this fight, we're well prepared for the next one.

Donna: We also want to help out people in the same situation, we've got a lot of solidarity with parents doing occupations elsewhere. Here in the Wyndford we've got another fight coming up with the council's 'regeneration' plans that are going to impact the area even further. They know how well we can fight though.

Allison: It'll be us calling the shots next time, not the other way round!

Occupations are not a new form of struggle, but the wave this year follows decades of this form of resistance fading into the background. If they are successful, they can prevent the closure of schools or workplaces. However, even if they don't win they have a wider social impact that is just as, if not more, important. They bring communities together, empowering the people involved and giving them the opportunity to fight back against those in power. The campaign against school closures in Glasgow will continue, with the resolve of those involved strengthened by the knowledge that they have the ability to stand up to the council, for themselves and for their children.

For more information or to get in contact with the Glasgow Anarchafeminists email glasgowanarchafem@gmail.com

When the right to Choose Clashes with the right to bear Arms

Words by Angela

It seemed like any other Friday morning at work on 30 December 1994. The cold New England winter was in full effect as I scurried into the warmth of the abortion clinic, where I worked as a receptionist and telephone counsellor. I greeted Steve, the armed security guard at the door, and clocked in. Steve was a somewhat eccentric guy who had been in the US Army for many years. He had the affect of someone who had been in combat and never quite got over it, but would never admit it. His modus operandi seemed to be "tough guy with a soft side," but on duty he was all tough guy. I was on phones that day, which I was thankful for because it was a busy Friday, and I didn't feel like dealing with all the patients in the waiting room downstairs. So I sat down, coffee in hand, shut the answering machine off, and started to answer the ringing phones.

When I told my parents I would be working at an abortion clinic on Beacon Street in Brookline, Massachusetts, my mother said, "I don't suppose I can talk you out of that, can I?" She knew the answer. I had been adamantly pro-choice for years, and despite the dangers of working in a clinic, I jumped at the chance. Massachusetts had a "buffer zone" law designed to protect patients and staff that prevented protesters from picketing closer than 18 feet from the building. Sadly, this was mostly not enforced, and clinics didn't have a method of screening who got into the building. Anyone could simply walk right in.

Later in the morning, I received a phone call from Steve's wife, wanting to know if he was OK. "Um...I think so?" I answered tentatively. Why would he not be? I peeked downstairs and saw him standing, like always, at his post. After she called, a couple of other people called, friends and family of some of the medical staff, wanting to know if they were OK too. I told them that everything was just fine here. But by then I was really starting to wonder what was going on.

That's when my boyfriend called. "Thank God," he said, when I answered the phone, "I nearly had a heart attack. Is everything OK?" He had been driving to work, listening to the radio, when a breaking news bulletin came on the air to say that two clinics on Beacon Street in Brookline had been attacked by a gunman. Several people, including each of their receptionists, had been shot. He heard the report on the radio and thought I might be dead. He nearly crashed the car pulling over to call me from a payphone. I insisted that I was fine, although inside I had started to panic a little.

It seemed as though the moment I knew why everyone was calling the clinic, the phone lines truly started to light up. Bits of information poured in about the clinic shootings. But one thing was on my mind and the minds of everyone I worked with: Lee Ann.

Lee Ann Nichols, our former co-worker, the woman who trained me to do my job, and though it sounds trite to say so, one of the most unique and fantastic people I'd ever met, had just left us to work at a neighbouring clinic only three months prior. So quiet and sweet, you would never expect her to be

wry and hilarious at the same time. And I remember the day she told me she was 38. I couldn't stop staring at her. She looked all of 24. We were sorry to see her go because she felt like the light of our office. But frustration at our overbearing boss forced her to find work elsewhere. She had been hired as a receptionist at Preterm, a clinic only a few blocks away. It had just been attacked. We hoped and prayed that she had had the morning off. I wish I could say that she did. But word quickly spread that Lee Ann had been shot. The gunman had walked into each of the clinics, verified with each receptionist that he was in the right place, and then pulled his rifle out of a gym bag and started shooting, starting with her. People ran for cover and out any door they could. Then he walked out. Neither of the clinics had armed security, so no one could stop him.

The two clinics that were hit each sat a few blocks on either side of the clinic where I worked. We wondered why he skipped over us. The only thing we could figure was that our armed guard, surveillance cameras, and the awkward layout of our clinic deterred him from hitting us. You had to walk through two heavy glass doors and down the stairs to get to reception. He could have gotten in, but he never would have gotten out alive. Supposedly, our security cameras showed him walking around the building several days before the attack. But knowing that he literally hit one clinic, drove by ours, and then hit the other was truly sickening.

We managed to finish out the workday in tears of sadness and fear. It may seem incredible that we saw all of our patients that day, and the only explanation I can come up with is that this clinic was a for-profit business. Lost patients meant lost revenue. But this for-profit status was also the reason why we had an armed guard, while the other two clinics, both non-profits, did not. My co-workers and I didn't put up a fuss about continuing to work, but the perpetrator still had not been caught, and we felt like sitting ducks, as if a bomb could go off any second.

When my shift was done, I went home and turned on the news. One man, who had been sitting in one of the waiting



lee ann nichols



shannon lowney

rest
in
p
eace

rooms talked about what happened. He said that as he sat in the waiting room, he was thinking to himself about the receptionist's voice, and how it was the most soothing, beautiful voice he'd ever heard. I started to cry because I knew he was speaking of Lee Ann. Her voice was pure music, and I'd remarked on it myself. But the man on TV continued to say that his reverie was broken by the gunman coming in and shouting at her "This is what you get! You should pray the rosary!" while he shot ten bullets into the woman the stunned witness had only, seconds before, been lulled by. "How could anyone shoot this innocent woman?" he asked. Lee Ann and Shannon Lowney, Planned Parenthood's receptionist, were pronounced dead. I turned off the television.

My boyfriend came home early from work with instructions and cash from his boss who commanded him to take me out for dinner. We went to our favourite Thai place. But everyone at all the tables around us were talking loudly about the clinic shootings. I wanted to stand up and scream at everyone that they didn't know the half of how horrible it was. It wasn't just a news story! People, really lovely people with lilting voices and hilarious senses of humour, who were loved and cared for by friends and family were dead. And here we all were having dinner talking about it like it was a soundbite. But of course I didn't. Instead we took home what was left of our food.

The next day, the front page of The Boston Herald featured a huge photo of Lee Ann being wheeled out to an ambulance, smeared all over in blood. She had no shirt on, a cloth haphazardly thrown on top of her, but you could clearly see the side of her breast. It was a disgusting last image of a friend, put there to sensationalise and sell papers.

A candlelight vigil was held in front of the statehouse as a reaction to the shootings. I went with a friend and co-worker. As we held little candles in our cold, chapped hands, we felt completely alienated by the chants and speeches given that night. Lee Ann Nichols and Shannon Lowney had become martyrs for the Pro-Choice cause. The occasion was not to remember who these two women were, but to declare what they would now represent. My companion and I couldn't see beyond our grief to grapple with the big picture just then.

On Sunday, I had to work again --my regular Sunday shift. I usually enjoyed Sundays because I was the only one in the building, so I had free reign to do whatever I wanted. Sometimes I even brought my guitar. But when I showed up less than 48 hours after the shootings, I found a cop car stationed out front guarding the building. The city provided this round-the-clock security to all of the clinics in case the suspect or anyone else wanted to have another go. At first, I thought I'd be brave and go in alone, disabling the security system in the

dark interior of the clinic. But once I was inside, I went back out again and asked one of the policemen to come in with me and have a look around. I thanked the policeman, and he went back to drinking coffee in his car while I turned the answering machine off and started my work. It was New Year's Day.

The news that John Salvi, the killer, had been caught in Norfolk, Virginia, shooting at a clinic there from outside, wouldn't be out until that day's paper. (Luckily no one was injured.) He pled insanity, saying he was schizophrenic, but was convicted of murder on March 19, 1996. Ironically, that same day, the Supreme Court agreed to review the constitutionality of abortion clinic "buffer zones." Salvi was found dead eight months later in his prison cell. When I saw his photo on the front page of the newspaper with the headline, I felt numb with hatred and anger: he'd never get to be punished for what he did. And since he died before his appeal could be processed, a judge overturned his conviction, essentially exonerating him after death. That's justice for you, I guess.

And clinic violence rages on. In May of this year, Dr. George Tiller, an abortion provider, was shot dead in his own church after repeated threats had been made to his life. In today's world of anti-terrorism campaigns, I wonder if those committing abortion clinic violence will ever be seen as the true terrorists that they are. Sadly, I'm not holding my breath.

a history of violence

Since Roe vs. Wade made abortions legal in the US in 1973, protests against clinics have become progressively more violent. Arson, gun fire, bombings, and chemical warfare are just some of the more alarming tactics. However, anti-choice protesters also use cameras to intimidate clinic patients, regularly blockade entrances, try to stop patients and their escorts from getting out of their cars, and stand outside of clinics with posters of mutilated babies on them. Their terrorist tactics are designed to instill fear in both the providers of abortion and anyone seeking their services.

The fight for Choice doesn't end with making abortion legal. The battles against anti-choice terrorism is a fight for all time. Since 1993, their violent, murderous tactics have failed to get the media coverage and outrage they deserve.

- 1993: Dr. David Gunn was shot to death in Pensacola, Florida. Dr. George Tiller was shot and injured in Wichita, Kansas.
- 1994: Dr. John Bayard Britton and his escort, James H. Barrett were shot and killed in front of a clinic in Pensacola, Florida. June Barrett was also shot and injured in the incident. Dr. Garson Romalis was shot and seriously wounded in his home in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Shannon Lowney and Leanne Nichols were shot and killed and five others injured at two clinics in Brookline, Massachusetts.
- 1995: Dr. Hugh Short was shot and injured in his home in Ancaster, Ontario, Canada.
- 1997: An unnamed physician was shot at in his home in Rochester, New York. Dr. Jack Fainman was shot and injured in his home in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.
- 1998: Officer Robert Sanderson was killed during a clinic bombing in Birmingham, AL. Emily Lyons, a nurse at the clinic was severely injured in the blast. Dr. Barnett Slepian was shot and killed in his home in Amherst, New York.
- 2009: Dr. George Tiller was shot and killed in his church in Wichita, Kansas.

For an idea of the frustrations, fears, and dangers faced by patients and pro-choice volunteer escorts at an abortion clinic in Kentucky, check out the blog "Every Saturday Morning": <http://everyaturdaymorning.wordpress.com/>

MY BODY, MY CHOICE.
Including the means of protecting it.



DEVILANT WOMBS

THOUGHTS ON OUR INSIDES AND THE RHETORIC OF CHOICE

BY SHONACH

In early medical texts, the "wandering womb" was a well-established disorder. It would literally push upwards and compress other organs, or in some cases, unexpelled menstrual blood might flood the brain, causing hysteria. Often a disease afflicting virgins, widows and spinsters, the root cause of this was lack of sexual intercourse with a man; treatment was focussed on remedying this.

warning – this article may be triggering – it is graphic in relation to miscarriage

I recently read that the most common operation in the West is caesarean section. Depending on the jumpiness of your hospital, around a quarter of all babies are born by caesarean section. The WHO gives us a conservatively large recommendation of 15%. Some midwifery-led birth centres have rates around the 5% mark. However you look at it, given proper support, at least half of all these "life saving" operations are performed unnecessarily. While in every other field of medicine surgeons are trying to limit the performance of major abdominal surgery, in obstetrics the rates continue to rise. That's major abdominal surgery with all the implications for recovery, infection, decreased mobility, problems with breast-feeding, nicked bladders and nerves, future incontinence, internal adhesions, the chance of future implantation of a placenta in the scar and subsequent haemorrhage, and almost certainty of future repeat caesareans.

The second most common operation is hysterectomy – the removal of the womb. Some doctors even combined the two as a neat family planning trick (see the Michael Neary case). It is interesting how little about our bodies is understood – and how often our wombs are taken in hand.

I'm studying to be a midwife. At the moment I am in placement on the gynaecological ward ("gyny" is the Greek root for "woman" – as in "misogyny"). So I'm on the women's ward; or the women's problems ward. As it's in a maternity hospital, there are a lot of women who come in having

miscarriages. The most common procedure that I've seen there is ERPC – Evacuation of Retained Products of Conception. This is where women have "incomplete" miscarriages and are scheduled for dilation of the cervix and sucking out of the contents of the womb. A greater proportion of women than have "complete" miscarriages, have "incomplete" ones and go through this procedure. Which, forgive me, just seems a little suction-happy to me.

I can only speak for myself and think back to early pregnancy; but if I was miscarrying, I would like to have some proper information about it. I'd like to know that I didn't have to be at the hospital – that there is nothing they can do to stop it happening. I'd like to know their procedure: they would scan, and if the miscarriage had started, or the foetal heart was absent, and unless my womb was empty, they would deem it missed or incomplete, and schedule me for an operation. Prior to the operation I'd be given cytotec – an abortifacient – to soften the cervix and bring on contractions.

The first woman I saw going for the procedure was in crippling pain. She had been scanned on Monday after a little bleeding – to find the foetal heart was not visible. She was scheduled for ERPC on Wednesday. On Monday night she came in with stronger pains and heavier bleeding – her miscarriage had started. She was given five cytotec tablets – two and a half times the usual dose – and admitted. This caused her agonising pain as she lay in the hospital bed miscarrying onto absorbent sheets. When theatre was ready that morning, she was brought in for ERPC. I first met her just before she was moved from the bed to the trolley. I saw her looking at the heap of blood and clots. She said, "Oh – I'm sorry" – as if somehow it was her fault – as if somehow she had caused a problem for us.

She waited all day for the doctor to come to talk to her about what had happened. But the doctor never came. As a student, I could only try to reassure her. I couldn't answer any of her questions – how long had the

foetus been dead – why? Eventually, a different doctor was sent in to speak to her. Afterwards she said it didn't feel real. The doctor was very cold. She couldn't believe it had happened...

The doctor had spoken to the woman about the procedure – her disembodied womb – not about the fact that she had miscarried – her loss – her life. I came home thinking about all the things I wish I had said to try to help her. I wondered how what she went through could have been made easier, or if she ever even thought she had the option to stay at home and sit on the toilet.

So now, as well as fantasising about a humane, midwifery-led clinic supporting birthing women, I have added in an annexe for women experiencing miscarriage. There, we will have access to abortifacient drugs, emergency procedures and scans. But more importantly, we will give support and information before, during and afterwards, practicing expectant management, mobilising women and helping them to go home or to stay there – but to miscarry in a way that they decide is least traumatic to them. This will never happen in the gynae ward, working around doctor's schedules, beds, and getting women in and out on the same day.

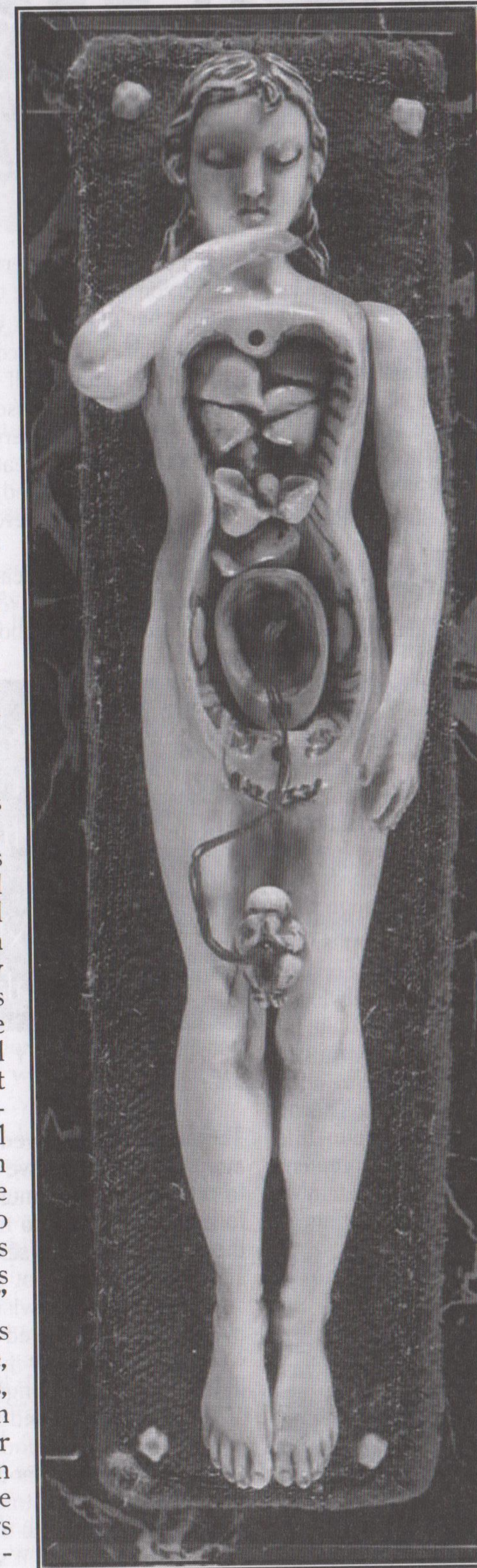
Before I embarked on a last-minute rant, I had wanted to write an article on "Choice" – about the emptiness of the rhetoric of choice as it relates to our maternity services. As we pass into a system under the care of others, it doesn't matter what legal rights we have, or whether we have the right to consent to procedures. Those with the knowledge and power in the situation are those to whom women will bend their decision making – i.e. the health care professionals. The health care professionals are hospital-focussed, system-focussed, risk-focussed and clock-focussed. And while subversion happens in favour of the woman sometimes, in general allegiances are with the system and with other workers. So, in relation to women's births; these should be fast, quiet and immobile.

In Ireland there is the added

complication of the public/private divide – with privileged women exerting their right to choose the "best" obstetrician – enforcing the cultural perception of medicalised care as safe care. In our hierarchical hospitals, that power lies with the consultant obstetricians; there are about a hundred of these in the country. Highly trained and qualified to deal with the most difficult and dangerous births, they preside over 99% of all births in the country, which take place in obstetric-led hospitals. Even though the most risk-happy analysis would place less than 10% of these birthing women in the "high risk" category. To give you an idea how much medical back up "low risk" women need; studies have shown that for women with no medical risks, birthing at home is exactly as safe (mortality and morbidity-wise) as birthing in a hospital. Placing low-risk women under the care of those who are trained to deal with pathologies leads to unnecessary medical and surgical interventions for these women. Large teaching hospitals exist for obstetricians. Consultant obstetricians earn about €220,000 per year to direct the care of public patients in the hospitals. They earn an extra at least €4,000 for each private patient they take on – about forty per month for about ten months in the year.

The ideology which upholds this powerful elite is an interventionist, risk-focussed one wherein all births are pathologised, monitored and controlled. It is an ancient patriarchal ideology which views birthing women as inherently incapable, and an oddly technocratic ideology which embraces all technology as good; for example the ubiquitous "electronic foetal monitors" – straps around almost every labouring woman's belly – measuring contractions and foetal heart rate. Yet these monitors have been unambiguously proven to increase rates of surgical interventions and to decrease safety for women. Choices that women can make within this system are often limited to "epidural" or "no epidural". While deep decisions about place, company, sustenance, movement, monitoring, interventions, acceleration, treatment of the newborn etc. are just routine procedures over which individual women have no option but to go along with. Midwives – the supposed autonomous practitioners and guardians of physiological birth – within this system are often little more than "obstetric nurses" administering to it. It is in this context that the debate about women's "choice" to have elective caesarean sections is taking place. Sometimes, an operation is perceived as a better alternative than the horribly managed experience that birth has become.

In the absence of support and advocacy, only the very powerfully privileged or well-informed women will push to assert their rights to less interventionist and traumatic births – or to question hospital procedures in favour of their individual "choices".



And often – paradoxically – it is the most prepared and assertive women who are worst treated under the hospital system. Women learn very quickly that to try to assert your rights and ask too much of your healthcare provider is to risk abuse at their hands. It is the death of the liberal feminist

dream of women's rights at its most blatant. Only in places where there are systematic and structural changes in maternity care are there real changes for women – all women. See for example Denis Walsh's writing on the culture of free standing birth centres in England or look into the midwifery-led services that women and midwives have been fighting for in New Zealand. Taping the rhetoric of choice on top of centralised institutions of hierarchical power – without challenging that power or its underlying ideology – will never achieve a thing.

This rhetoric of choice also relates to our non-existent abortion services. It's ironic, don't you think, that there is so much womb suctioning going on, and so little thought about trauma to women, yet still no option for abortion for women in Ireland. Though I can't imagine how badly managed those procedures would be here if we had them. We need discussions about support and humanising services – and recognising the powers pulling at our wombs as much as we need discussions about decriminalisation of abortion. And before last week, I hadn't even thought about choices – or supported decision making – around miscarrying.

We are labouring under a misogynist system that has a visceral grip on our wombs, controlling us at the very centre of our productive being – and extending out to our sexual, physical and emotional being. We are all touched by it that identify as women, whether we have wombs or not, or ever intend to become pregnant. It is up to us as women to escape this grip – to support each other as women, as midwives and as allies and to say that we have had enough. We want not to be subject to routine procedures that suit antiquated centralised systems, nor to be given an empty menu of sanctioned choices. We want structural change; the dismantling of the public/private divide, the destruction of the hierarchy of obstetrics over midwifery, and of health care providers over women. We want the opportunity for real supported ethical decision making that takes into account our lives as well as our wombs. Because we have to live with our bodies, our babies and our losses afterwards.

Reference:

Nadine Pilley Edwards writes about choice vs ethical decision making in *Why Can't Women Just Say No? And Does It Really Matter?* in the book *Informed Choice In Maternity Care*, edited by Mavis Kirkham, Palgrave Macmillan 2004.

THE ASSASSINATORS

AN INTERVIEW BY CLODAGH

The Assassimators, from Denmark, play poppy (but rocking) political punk rock that makes you want to dance and sing-along in makey-uppy Danish.

A lot of the people reading RAG magazine aren't from the punk/diy scene, can you explain a bit about this scene/subculture and what it means to you?

LISA: For me being a part of the punk/DIY scene is about taking control of my own life - when it comes to playing shows, being political or releasing records/zines and so on. It's the only way you can challenge what today is defined as normal and supposedly represents the white, western, mid-20's, straight woman or man. Luckily most of us know and feel that we don't belong in their boxes and for me punk and DIY was an alternative to that way of life. All us outcasts can get together and have some good, clean, family fun while fuckin' with the status quo as much as we possibly can, whether that's a way of dressing, playing, writing, working is entirely up to each individual.

I guess that the whole punk subculture is massive and that's cool, but I mostly care about the local scene (of wherever I live...) and that's where you can really move and deal with issues on a community level where everyone can be heard. That's a million times better than their make-believe money-making democracy where everyone can scream and shout, and never be heard other than every fourth year when the elections are on - like that's ever gonna change shit!

ANNA: Hmm, it means reproducing society's shitty norms but wearing different style, more smelly clothes, ha. Hmm, nah, I reckon it's a network of people with more or less the same political views, hoping to create a different, alternative and better environment, with space for everyone who gives space to everyone. As you can see on my first sentence, I from time to time get very disillusioned about this, and sometimes find it hard to not just see the punk scene as replicating the society we try so hard to be an alternative to. It is like by entering this scene we sign some kind of virtual agreement that we are against sexism, racism, homophobia, patriarchy etc. We then pretend like we have washed off all of the above (which is of course completely impossible since we all grew up in a society that reeks of these) and thus make it even harder to talk about when it

happens amongst us; it gets stigmatised. We then, from time to time, point out "sinners" i.e. people who have acted sexist or racist and so on and exclude them from our community. Suddenly everyone is member of the jury and instead of prison you'll get exclusion.

I think that only by recognising that these shitty things unfortunately are buried deep in all of us - to talk and help each other discover how they show themselves and in which behaviour patterns - then we can be better aware of how they affect us as well as others and we in the end can create ways of being in the world free of sexism, racism, patriarchy and so on. Still I have to say that the punk/DIY scene is one of the better alternatives I've come across yet.

I found anarchism because I was involved with diy punk rock - how did you?

LISA: Same. Zines, books, records and lots of drunken talks with awesome people!

"I have always had the feeling that I had to work harder to get the same respect or recognition, whatever, in school, work, the punk scene etc. Not until I got into this band did I start relaxing more 'cause I wasn't the only woman here."

ANNA: I found DIY punk rock because I was involved with anarchism.

The punks etc. involved with UNGDOMSHUSET (see text box for more information) have had practical experience of literally fighting to protect their community - that is outside the experience of most folks. Can you talk to me about the positive things you learned at these times and was sexism ever an issue?

LISA: Pffff that's a lot of things! I don't really know where to start. I guess we all got wiser. Obviously, there is some bond created by the people involved and that creates some sort of trust. Also, when you are under a lot of pressure you automatically turn to those you trust. Things were happening extremely fast and one of the things I learned was that no matter how well planned and prepared you feel, your body switches to this adrenalin/instinct/survival/vengeance mode and shit just happens. That and a huge amount of disappointment and fuckin' pure rage can change shit. And when it comes to outside support: That shit is amazing! Those days where you feel it's all lost so what's the fucking point, that's where a world-wide solidarity crew assure you that some things are worth fighting for and you are not the one that is fucked up, the system is.

And, of course, sexism was an issue. It always is, but for quite some time it was the fight for the house that was the main thing. I reckon it is important to not let go of the everyday struggles just cause this big important thing is happening, so when it's all over and you have to start anew you have a solid, healthy foundation to build on.

ANNA: I think the positive experience I got from this struggle was that if you really want something (in Denmark anyway), you can

get it if you organise well and take it to the streets. Sexism wasn't really an issue for me during this period. Not that sexism is not an issue in a situation like this, but it seems that in this almost war-like situation there wasn't even a moments peace to think about that specifically - my thoughts were with my friends who were being arrested, beaten up and imprisoned, everything was chaos. If you felt like doing something, throwing something, putting something on fire, you did it - and next to you you'd see your friends in all shapes, forms and genders doing the same.

"I believe in encouraging women to be more visible in everything we do. And I mean every-fucking-thing!"

What sort of musical background do the band members come from?

LISA: I had piano lessons and shit, but I didn't learn to really play until I was in a band.

ANNA: I taught myself how to play guitar when I was 14, but I reckon I only got better because we started to play more and more complicated stuff in the band.

Please describe how a song is created in the assassimators band and how you organise tours, recording etc.

LISA: One of us have a song, bring it to band practice. We then play it a bunch a times, see how it feels, get the lyrics working, the tempo working and so on and then when it feels comfortable to everyone we play it live.

Tours are organised by either ourselves, or other people from the punk scene who put up tours. They send an email and ask if we wanna come play and then we say yes. Or no! Luckily Stine's brother is a sound engineer so he helps us with that [recording].

I have mixed feelings about bands with women in them. One on hand, I think it is harder for women to get involved in music so such bands have a special place in my heart BUT on the other hand I believe it should be a normal thing too and I shouldn't make this fuss. Am i the only person who thinks like this? Did any of the women in the band feel like they had to work harder because of their gender?

LISA: I think a lot of people feel like you. And it is a bit of a touchy subject to talk about cause as you say, you don't wanna like a band just cause it's a wimmin band, but you don't wanna ignore it either cause unfortunately it is not a normal thing...yet!!!

As a woman I can honestly say that I have always had the feeling that I had to work harder to get the same respect or recognition, whatever, in school, work, the punk scene etc... Not until I got into this band did I start relaxing more 'cause I wasn't the only woman here. Now I don't feel like I have to prove shit but sometimes you can just feel the crowd (almost always mainly guys, unfortunately) being there to see "the female fronted punk band" and then see the surprised faces when they realise we can play and that pisses me off! But what makes me more angry is going to shows where there's lots of women but no one dances and the dude with the mic says "please make room for the ladies up the front" like that doesn't contribute to maintaining the gender roles! And that happens all the time in the punk scene and it's fucking sad. I'm sure some of these guys do it to be nice or whatever, but its all those little things that just keeps us trapped in those roles. And it's not just women but men too. I don't believe in encouraging women to be in bands just cause they're women, I believe in encouraging women to be more visible in everything we do. And I mean every-fucking-thing! That and proper communication about gender roles, sexism, power, control etc. can change a lot. Half of this population are women and we should have half the power, right?

ANNA: I think women in punk rock get loads of positive response and loads of attention, in a way that men don't. I know we have. So I guess that I'd prefer that there wouldn't be a fuss about it unless a band profiled themselves to be an "all woman" or a "woman fronted" band, which we haven't. I know loads of amazing strong women

out there that I trust would have taken up playing music had it been their wish and interest. And by playing I can only hope that it will show that is definitely a possibility if you want to. Focusing on what can be empowering to women instead of focusing on what is disempowering seems of vital importance to me when it comes to feminism.

I understand you've toured extensively and been lucky enough to play as far a field as Japan and Australia. What do these touring experiences mean to you?

LISA: Well, it's amazing that something you are passionate about can take you all over the world. I wish that everyone tried to feel that at least once in their life. But it's fucking hard work as well. People are tired, hung over and cranky and you do everything together eat, sleep, drive and frankly it's quite draining! But luckily it's DIY so we can just stop whenever we want!

ANNA: The tours have been amazing and have brought me to places I would have never been had it not been for the band, I can't believe how privileged we are.

When I saw you play in Dublin, a friend pointed out your mothers to me, they had travelled over to the concert, how important is this type of family support, do they like the rawk?

LISA: Well it's nice that they like it. It's punk rock for mommas!

ANNA: Hehe, yeah that was my mother and her friend. It was good fun to have them over and privileged to have a mother who is interested and supportive in what you do. That means a lot. I do think my ma is a bit more appreciative towards the Irish trad I play - that's more a taste thing though. Haha, yis should have seen her facial expression when I told her the band before us was called "Fuck you written in shit" - it was priceless!!

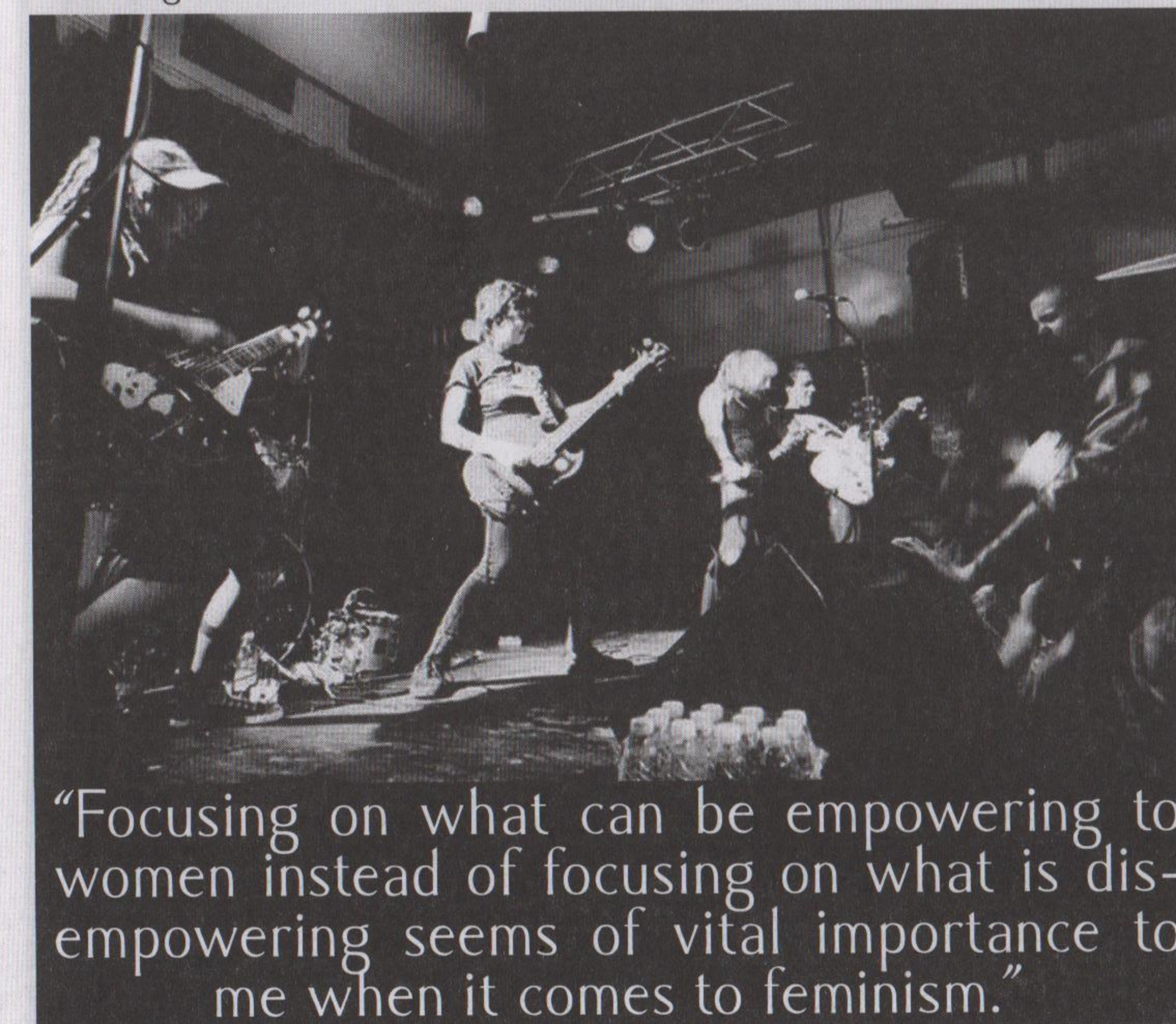
Do you identify as feminists or is feminism for you an obvious part of anarchism?

LISA: Well, I guess I do. Don't really think much of defining myself as something. But yeah feminism as a part of anarchism for sure. Where else is there room for it?

ANNA: I don't really identify or label myself as a feminist or an anarchist. It might sound stupid but I don't really feel like I have earned any of those titles. I haven't read enough feminist or anarchist literature to know what I need to know to call me either of those. I guess I would label myself autonomous (or wanker!) if I had to label myself anything - but inspired by anarchistic thoughts as well as feminist of course. And yes I do think those two are inseparable.

Are there any interesting feminist groups in Denmark you can tell me about? Can you recommend any Danish bands or publications?

LISA: I actually have no idea. I'd recommend a bunch of bands to ya but I wouldn't consider them feminist. I know that soon there is a compilation out on Stonehenge* which has a bunch of awesome bands on it (Signal Lost, La Fraction, Witch Hunt). All with women!



"Focusing on what can be empowering to women instead of focusing on what is disempowering seems of vital importance to me when it comes to feminism."



ANNA: I haven't really been in the country for a while. However, I find the queer groups over here to be the most free-minded, feminist groups around to work with. I recommend the cph queer festival (www.queerfestival.org)

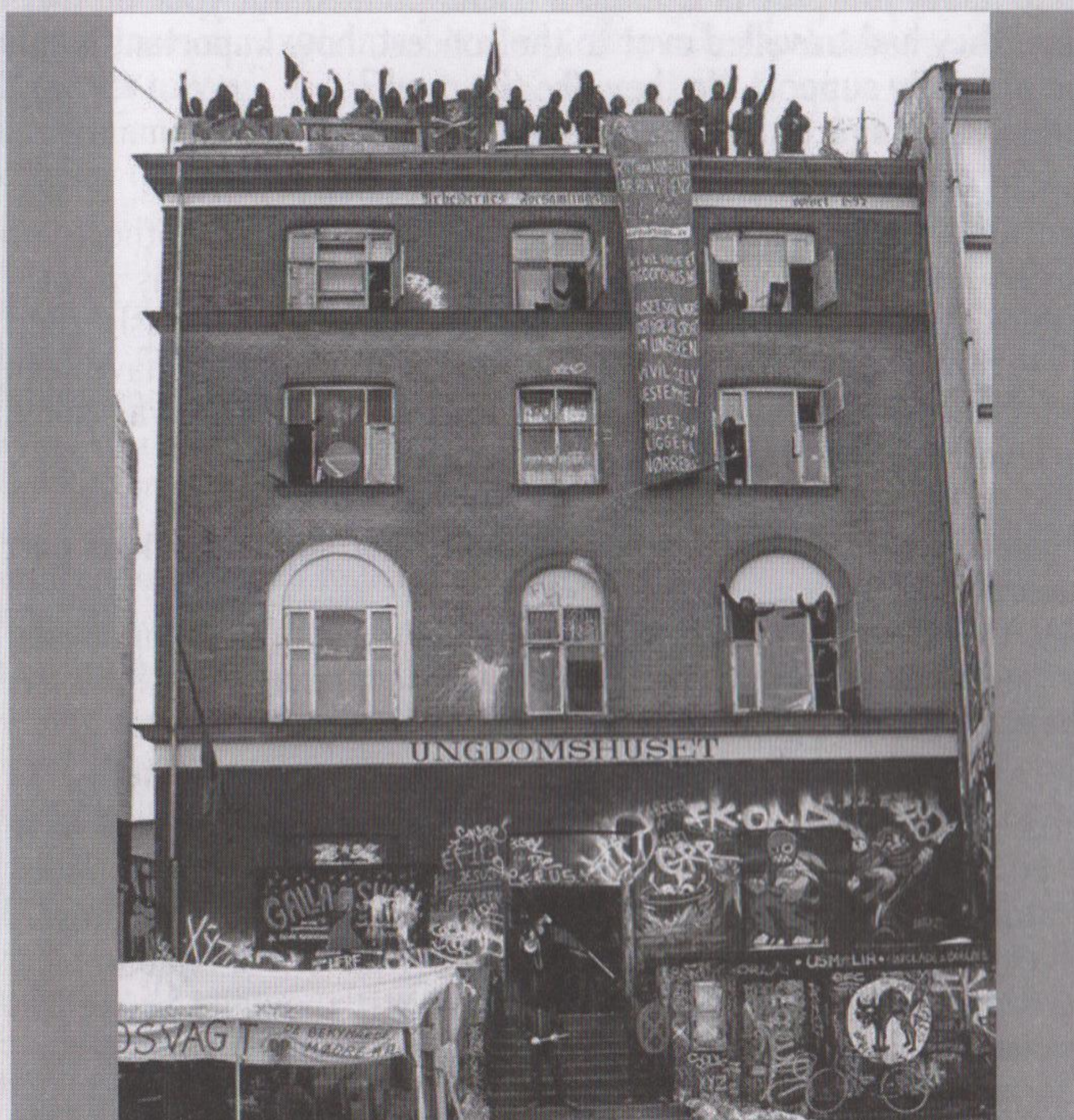
What are The Assassimators doing at the moment and what are your future plans?

LISA: Recording new 7", touring the states, releasing a split 7" with Japanese punx DSB.

ANNA: ...and then finito. Thanks much for doing the interview and good luck with the RAGazine!

Thanks to Anna and Lisa for taking the time to answer my questions. The band will be taking a break for a "long time" after the Japanese release. Listen to Assassimators here <http://www.myspace.com/theassassimators>

*The Stonehenge compilation (More than Music Volume 1) referred to is available from Christophe: cybergod@stonehengerecords.com



UNGDOMSHUSET (meaning "youth house") at Jagtvej 69 in Copenhagen was (since 1982) an enormous community centre belonging to the youth of the city which the city managers decided to sell to a right wing Christian sect without consulting the tenants, or offering alternative accommodation—they just wanted rid of the type of people who congregated there it seems. Years of protests followed, culminating in a massive police action in March 2007, when the occupants were forcibly removed. Riots, that even made it into the Irish broadsheets, followed. The city managers gave a new Ungdomshuset to the people in the Bispebjerg area of the city. The story of Ungdomshuset is inspiring to me because the people involved just didn't give up their fight against what was unjust and won victory in the end.



WORDS AND IMAGES BY EMILY

Let's talk about sex baby, let's talk about you and me, let's talk about all the good things and the bad things that may be (let's talk about HPV), let's talk about sex.

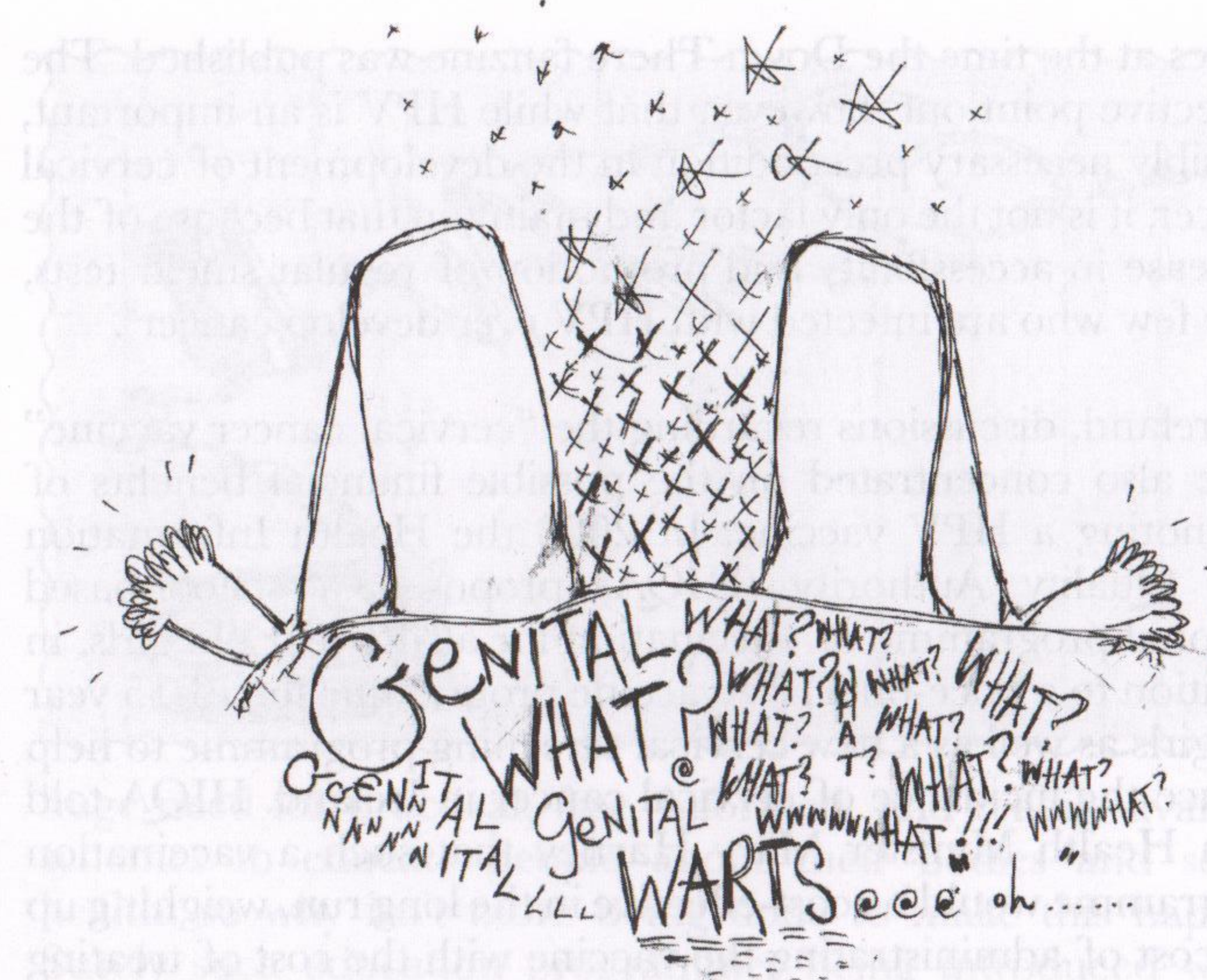
Wart-cunt: A tale of HPV.

THE VIRUS

When a one night stand awkwardly told me her sexual health screen had revealed "what might be a genital wart", I felt cheated and angry. I immediately ran to the internet, anxiety surging and thoughts frantic. The online information was confusing, with contradictory explanations and details, depending which website I surfed. And as I scrolled through pages of how I might develop cervical cancer or how any babies I might have could grow warts in their throat and be unable to breathe, my anxiety grew... ok, so this is a slight exaggeration of the worst example but it was my state of mind at the time. I saw my future self consulting potential lovers about my 'condition' from a bedside perch. No more sex, ever. No blow jobs. No cunnilingus. No casual romps or drunken hook-ups. Contamination. Social stigma. Wart-cunt.

I had just been for a smear test (also known as a pap test) and had asked my GP if everything looked ok down there, since she was having a look anyways. I had a strange but normal enough bump on my 'Labium Majora' and wanted to know if it corresponded to the (what could be, nobody seems to be able to tell me for sure) sebaceous cysts I have on my rib cage and under my breasts. She impatiently told me that I was just prone to blocked pores. Unconvinced, I asked her to forward me on to a dermatologist. A month later, I received a letter letting me know I had an appointment with a dermatologist in the Mater Hospital on the 27th of January 2011. But no mention of genital warts.

After my fleeting fool-around dropped her news, I decided a thorough sexual health check was well overdue. In Ireland however, the services are limited. James' Hospital operate a free sexual health screening service, which I had visited once before, but decided to leave because the wait was too long (having arrived at 8.30 in the morning, I wouldn't have seen a doctor until after 1pm, yeah). The next obvious option was the Well Woman Centre in Dublin city, but at €160 I couldn't afford the service. The next best thing was Charter Medical in Smithfield at €120. I am tight for cash, but felt the situation was urgent enough to warrant spending the money and was promised a woman doctor. Despite this, when I arrived for my appointment there was no woman doctor, but a nurse reassured me that she was fully capable of doing the check, only calling in a man doctor if absolutely necessary. I racked her brains about HPV, the grumpy but extremely common 'human papilloma virus'. What did it mean? What did I need



to do? Was it truly no more brainless sex ever again? Was I an official contaminant? Yes, yes you are. She told me that there were a few warts externally, so ambiguous I hadn't even seen them when I examined myself. Internally too, I had a couple on the inner walls of my vagina. Oh Lordy. Is this what Christian guilt feels like? Were these unseen fleshly appearances the manifestation of my selfish desire and sexual misdeeds? Was this punishment from God? I nearly cried. I felt hugely regretful and irresponsible. This was a ghost of sex without respect.

I was told to make an appointment for cryotherapy at the Well Woman centre and went on my way. But so many of my questions were still unanswered. Why didn't my GP tell me I had genital warts? Had she even recognised them? Surely there was a way of getting this creepy and highly inconvenient virus out of my system! First and foremost, people had to be informed. It wasn't too bad, my boyfriend reassured me. This had happened, now I just had to deal with it.

The next week I went to the Well Woman clinic on Liffey Street for my cryotherapy appointment which was going to cost me €35 for each treatment, the number of treatments continuing for as long as the warts persisted. The Well Woman nurse reassured me that HPV was nothing really to worry about, "86% of the population have it. If you ever have sex you are very likely to pick it up... it really isn't a big deal", she encouraged. You can imagine my surprise then when she told me I didn't have genital warts. "Maybe you had them a week ago, but you don't have them now. What I'm looking at is actually just the skin on your vagina. Perfectly normal". As a precaution she went ahead with the cryotherapy, and once she was done, I couldn't sit down for days. Maybe I was just being a wuss, but I squirmed like a piglet. I asked her if continuing with the treatment was absolutely necessary, and peering up from between my knees with her metal canister of nitrogen oxide she grinned, "I usually give people five goes". Weirdo.

Turns out there was evidence of genital warts, but the Well Woman nurse told me that if I had come into her for a sexual health screen she wouldn't even have mentioned them. Curious and curiouser. She said that HPV and genital warts are so common and mine were so tiny that she wouldn't have said a thing. She was surprised that the nurse at Charter Medical even suggested I come for cryotherapy and seemed to think that was very strange indeed, but treated me anyway to make sure they were DEAD DEAD DEAD. I was more confused than ever.

Suddenly I remembered that underneath the piles of fanzines somewhere in the RAG distro was a fanzine on HPV. I dug it out. Reading it was amazing! Yes, everyone has different takes on HPV, genital warts, the controversial vaccine, and what the

hell is going on. Importantly my suspicions were confirmed; it is possible to get rid of the virus and it is possible to keep the warts away — one mega powerful immune system, lots of sleep, no smoking, carotene goodness, cantaloupe melons and a sugar detox STAT!

The fanzine goes into much more detail about how you can manage and even eliminate HPV from your system, conventional and alternative remedies, how to talk to your partner(s) about HPV, what to ask your doctor and "How the HPV Vaccine Shows We Need to Smash the State".

THE VACCINE

During Cervical Cancer Prevention Week in Ireland in 2008, Dr. Tracy Murray, medical spokesperson with the Irish Family Planning Association, claimed that a woman dies from cervical cancer every 18 minutes in Europe. "In Ireland", she continued, "180 women are newly diagnosed with cervical cancer and 73 women, on average, die from the disease each year. This is scandalous when you consider that cervical cancer is a preventable disease. We hope this Week will show Irish women how important it is to regularly attend clinics for smear tests, or vaccinate themselves against the disease".

Having read a little about the supposed cervical cancer vaccine however, it seems that the quick positivity whipped up around the new vaccine is over-simplified in the media and mainstream discourses, controversial in its speedy social inception and highly questionable upon closer inspection. The bottom line, in my opinion from what I've read, is that the cervical cancer vaccine can be understood as a largely capitalist venture and one which won't necessarily protect women from cancer, or educate them about their bodies for that matter. This belief is based on the fact that cervical cancer, as with HPV itself (hypothetically at least), is totally preventable. Providing a vaccine to combat a disease which can be managed through regular smear tests and a good diet reveals the failings of

HERE ARE SOME FACTS THAT I'VE BORROWED FROM THE DOWN THERE HEALTH COLLECTIVE HPV FANZINE.....

- There are over 100 HPV types.
- About 30 of these types are sexually transmitted and cause genital HPV.
- Genital HPV is spread through skin-to-skin contact, not through an exchange of bodily fluid. HPV can be spread by vaginal, anal, and possibly oral sex.
- Though condom use helps protect against HPV, genital HPV cannot entirely be prevented by condom use.
- The HPV virus usually has no symptoms and does not cause disease — people usually don't know they have it.
- HPV can be contracted from one partner, remain dormant, and then later be unknowingly transmitted to another sexual partner.
- If you contract HPV, don't blame yourself or your partner. Your HPV status is not an indicator of your sexual behavior or that of your partners.
- HPV is usually harmless, but some types of HPV can cause cervical or other cancers in rare cases.
- Most people will have HPV at some point, but very few will develop cervical cancer. The immune system of most people will usually suppress or eliminate HPV. Only an HPV infection that does not go away over many years can lead to cervical cancer.
- Cervical cancer is preventable. Early detection of abnormal cell changes through use of the Pap test has drastically reduced rates of cervical cancer in industrialized nations.
- The best way to screen for cervical cancer is a Pap test, which may be done alone or in combination with an HPV DNA test.

a poor health care system. Unsurprisingly, according to the Down There Health Collective (DTHC), women who are most at risk from cervical cancer are overwhelmingly women of colour and low income, underprivileged women who do not have access to health care services worldwide and in the United States: "About half of the women in the US who develop cervical cancer have never had a Pap test". According to the DTHC fanzine cervical cancer accounts for just 2.5% of cancer related deaths in the US. Globally however, there are approximately 500,000 new cases of cervical cancer annually, cervical cancer being the second most common cancer death among women, resulting in 288,000 deaths each year. Almost 80% of these deaths happen in the developing world, places without facilities to provide preventive careⁱⁱ.

Even in Westernised countries, having the cervical cancer vaccine does not eliminate the need to go for regular smear tests since the vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV. DTHC states that around 30% of cervical cancer in the United States is caused by strains of HPV which are not covered by the vaccine. Further, the vaccine will not treat existing HPV conditions, infections, or other HPV related diseases, nor does it protect against all HPV strains that can cause genital warts or other sexually transmitted infections (STIs)ⁱⁱ. So in April of 2007 when the Washington DC City Council wanted to pass legislation for mandatory HPV vaccines for all girls entering the 6th grade, it outraged parents and women's health advocates alike. The DTHC wonder, "since when has the City Council started caring so much about young girls' health? Did we miss the press release about mandating education on the importance of 'down there' health and free Pap tests to all women? Where is the money mandated to address more pressing health challenges? Cervical cancer is not a major epidemic in DC, so why the rush to require this vaccine?"ⁱⁱⁱ

SOME FACTS

Most references to the HPV vaccine refer to pharmaceutical company Merck's 'Gardasil'. The DTHC explain that Gardasil is a three-dose vaccine which defends against four types of HPV: two strains of the virus that can cause genital warts (HPV 6 and 11) and two of approximately 15 high-risk HPV strains that may lead to cervical cancer (HPV 16 and 18). Combined, these four HPV types cause 70% of cervical cancers and 90% of genital warts. Gardasil has been approved for girls and women ages 9 to 26 years and is currently marketed at 11 and 12 year old girls with the intention of having them vaccinated before they become sexually active. At the time of the fanzine's publication, Gardasil was the only Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved HPV vaccine. Apparently GlaxoSmithKline manufactures a vaccine called Cervarix that protests against several strains of cancer-threatening HPV, including HPV 16 and 18, which was expected to become available in the United



States at the time the Down There fanzine was published. The collective point out, however, that while HPV is an important, possibly necessary precondition in the development of cervical cancer, it is not the only factor and maintain that because of the increase in accessibility and promotion of regular smear tests, very few who are infected with HPV ever develop cancerⁱⁱⁱ.

In Ireland, discussions regarding the "cervical cancer vaccine" have also concentrated on the possible financial benefits of promoting a HPV vaccine. In 2008 the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) proposed a school-based national programme of vaccination for all 12-year old girls, in addition to a once-off HPV vaccine programme for 13-15 year old girls as well as a new cervical screening programme to help reduce the incidence of cervical cancer in Ireland. HIQA told Irish Health Minister Mary Harney that such a vaccination programme would be cost-effective in the long run, weighing up the cost of administering the vaccine with the cost of treating women who might get cervical cancer without the vaccine. Both Gardasil and Cervarix are now available in Ireland, but not on state vaccine schemes. Currently the cost of the three injections is €390. HIQA estimate that if the vaccine was introduced as a school-based programme the scheme for 12-year-olds would cost €9.7 million per annum. If a programme for 12-15 year-olds was also initiated, it would result in an additional cost of €29.9 million in the first year, and since the follow-up studies relating to the vaccine's effectiveness is only five years, no one actually knows how useful the vaccine actually is long termⁱⁱⁱ. Indeed as the Down There Health Collective point out, some immunologists believe that because there are so many strains of HPV, it might easily mutate, and the strains that are currently not accommodated for in the vaccine could become stronger and cause more disease, in the process making the vaccine completely ineffectiveⁱⁱ.

Since the advent of widespread use of smear tests in the US, cervical cancer rates have steadily declined. In fact, cervical cancer has gone from being one of the primary causes of cancer-related deaths in American women to not even being in the top 10, because it is now preventable. At the community forum held in Washington DC to address the introduction of the above-mentioned mandatory vaccine for 6th grade girls, one mother and nurse stated in plain language the hidden issues surrounding the promotion of the HPV vaccine: "We (women) need to recognize that nutrition and lifestyle are the most important factors in our health, and much of this we can take care of ourselves."ⁱⁱⁱ

The issues surrounding the vaccine have also revealed how our conceptions of sexual health are heavily gendered. One of the most controversial elements of the debate in mainstream media is the argument that the introduction of a STI vaccine might encourage more sexual promiscuity amongst young girls. However, since the vaccine has become available for boys in the US, the debate has shifted from discussions regarding sexual morals to one considering whether the vaccine is worth the money and whether the vaccine is safe and effective enough^{iv}, a very familiar double standard where our society still frets about the sexuality of women more than we do of men. I add here too that it was only when the vaccine was marketed to little boys that questions of quality and safety began to emerge in mainstream discourse regarding the HPV vaccine.

It took me so long to have a thorough sexual health check primarily because it is inaccessible and unaffordable in Dublin, where I live. Why is it then that more is not being done to help educate women in how to carry out self exams or indeed, more isn't being done to make sexual health care and basic educational knowledge more available to everyone? If HPV is so common why isn't there clear information made available to people? The debate around the vaccine has indicated a



huge need for practical, free, informed, and readily available schemes to educate people about their bodies and sexual health, so why isn't more being done to make this happen? Surely such education programmes being introduced would significantly help Ireland's current health care crisis. I mean, I got an appointment with a dermatologist for 2011! That is a little under two years away from now.

I share the opinions of the Down There Health Collective when they say that Gardasil highlights how our current health care system promotes a social medical situation where profits of large pharmaceutical companies are insured over the cultivation of a holistic and preventative healthcare system. We act as if the most effective remedy, the most practical way to deal with disease is in its worst or most extreme or deadly manifestation – in this case cervical cancer – when this is obviously not the case. In fact, it is far simpler than that. What this really boils down to is an urgent need for universal health care knowledge, an empowering body education made available as a social scheme, improved doctor-patient communication and facilities for D.I.Y. health care. Like the Down There Health Collective, I too want control over my own health. I mean, if several official websites and three medical professionals can't give me straight answers, I demand a speculum to see for myself! I want access to research and studies to teach me how my body works. I want sound advice about what I can do to take care of myself and others I care about, and most people I know share this simple expectation.

We want these things and more:

"We want children to be taught about and to understand their bodies. We want a culture that embraces and provides for holistic, culturally appropriate health care. We want a society that understands the connections between mental health, nutrition, rest, plants, the natural world and physical health. We want to learn how to do our own Pap tests and have access to labs to analyze them. We want free Pap tests. We want free and accessible health care. We want access to naturopaths, herbalists, massage therapists, midwives, and doctors that listen. We want communities to be able to create and control their own health care"ⁱⁱⁱ.

EPILOGUE

Today, two weeks after the cryotherapy trauma, I returned to Well Woman for a check up. Despite having been through an emotional war trying to get my head around this experience, I was still dreading what new horror the nurse might spring upon me this time round, what previously unknown information might be brought to light, what ghastly chemical was going to be inflicted on my poor pussy! I was pretty damn sure I didn't want to get another blast of the sinister nitrogen oxide canister, but since the warts had been so ambiguous and the information about them so elusive, I decided one last appointment would be good for a clear conscience. This time it was an older woman nurse who called me 'dear' and was comfortingly friendly and straight forward, putting me at ease immediately. She was thorough and was sure I didn't have genital warts, but called in

the doctor for a second opinion. I definitely didn't have genital warts. Definitely. She looked inside too... nope, nothing, nada, zilch, except my perfectly healthy vagina. Woopie! Amazing! Done. In a way though, despite the expense and confusion and huge energy spent fretting about being a contagion, and confusing medical practitioners and sore fannies and capitalist exploitation and social stigma and so on, I'm glad this happened. I think I needed to be activated into taking sexual health seriously. But more importantly, I realize how absolutely necessary it is to be in charge of my body and be knowledgeable in things such as what is up with my lady parts and what can I do to stay well and protected. It's actually shocking that I've been to four medical practitioners now (technically five if you include the doctor with the second opinion earlier today) and only now I feel certain and safe and taken care of. Crazy! Surely I should have felt that from the get-go? Anyway, I'm getting myself a speculum. If anyone should know what my cervix looks like, its me.

Some interesting lady-bits links:

Body knowledge/ contraception/ conception:

www.fertaware.com

www.beautifulcervix.com

The full, free Down There Health Collective fanzine can be downloaded from this online address:

<http://zinelibrary.info/hpv>

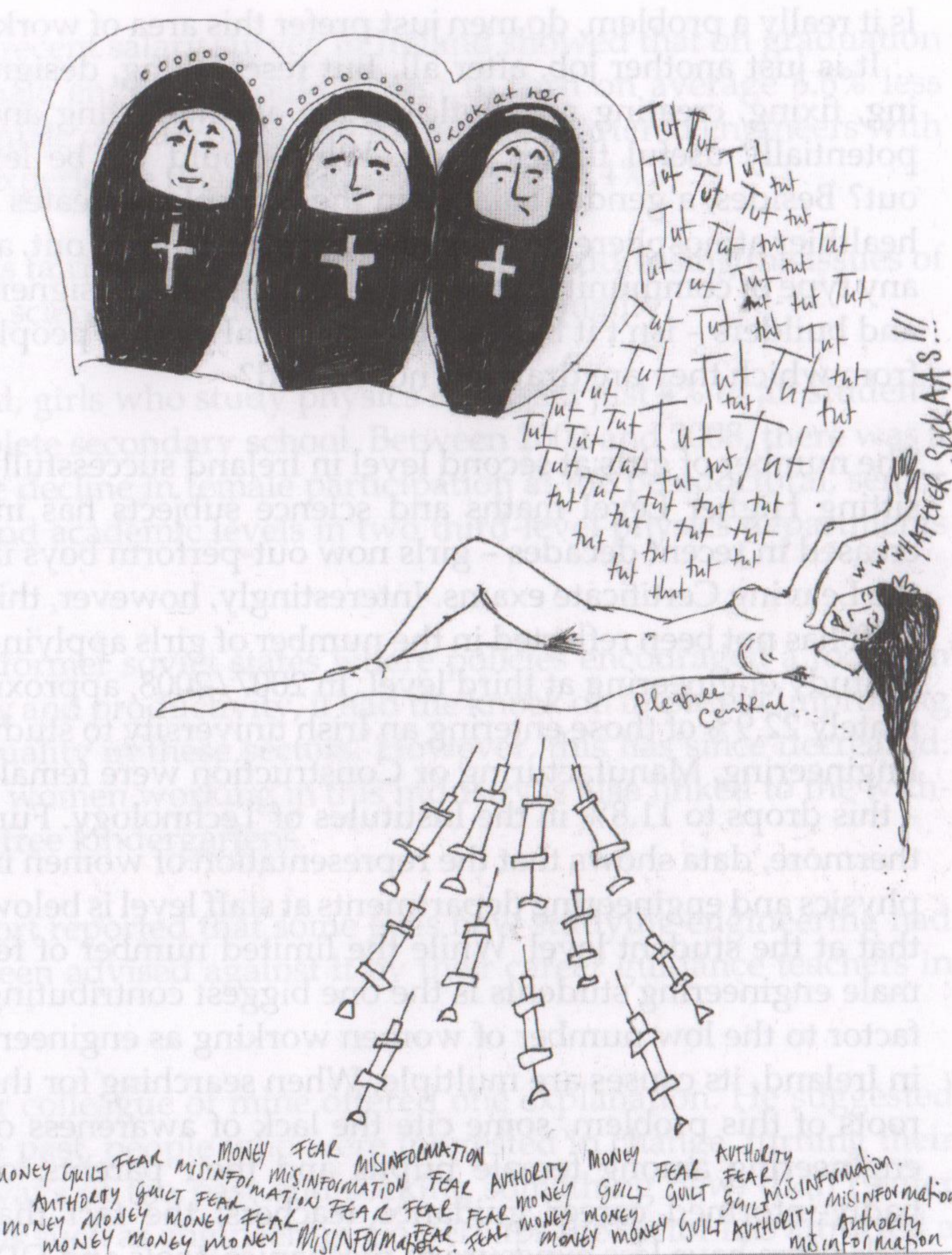
Endnotes

ⁱ Public urged to show their support for Cervical Cancer Prevention Week (author unknown) (January 2008), available from www.ifpa.ie

ⁱⁱ HPV, Down There Health Collective fanzine.

ⁱⁱⁱ HPV vaccine recommended for young girls by Deborah Condon and Niall Hunter (June, 2008), available from www.irishhealth.com

^{iv} A Vaccine Debate Once Focused on Sex Shifts as Boys Join the Target Market by Rob Stein (March 2009), available from www.washingtonpost.com



LADIES THAT COUNT

WOMEN IN ENGINEERING

BY CLARE

Women in engineering, science and technology: what's the big deal? Well to start, there are not nearly enough of us. Only 9% of engineers in Ireland are women and there are no real signs of change. A recent government-sponsored report recommended that Ireland should aim for a 50/50 gender ratio in this sector – empty words, unfortunately, as they didn't indicate how this might be achieved. To answer how the balance can be improved, we (and they) first need to ask why the imbalance exists.

Lots of things influence the accessibility of science and engineering jobs, including availability of training, educational privilege and money to support yourself through college. These barriers impact both sexes, but it is clear that women face further obstacles.

Is it really a problem, do men just prefer this area of work? ...It is just another job, after all. But researching, designing, fixing, creating and building are all interesting and potentially useful things to do. Why should we be left out? Besides, a gender balance in the workplace creates a healthier atmosphere. In the end, all of society loses out, as any type of community worth creating will need designers and builders – isn't it better if the potential pool of people from which they are drawn is not halved?

The number of girls at second level in Ireland successfully sitting Higher Level maths and science subjects has increased in recent decades – girls now out-perform boys in the Leaving Certificate exams. Interestingly, however, this shift has not been reflected in the number of girls applying to study engineering at third level. In 2007/2008, approximately 22.9% of those entering an Irish university to study Engineering, Manufacturing or Construction were female – this drops to 11.8% in the Institutes of Technology. Furthermore, data shows that the representation of women in physics and engineering departments at staff level is below that at the student level. While the limited number of female engineering students is the one biggest contributing factor to the low number of women working as engineers in Ireland, its causes are multiple. When searching for the roots of this problem, some cite the lack of awareness of engineering among female pupils and their parents, or badly-informed career guidance teachers; the fact that girls often have less exposure to mechanics, tools and DIY while growing up; others point towards the poor access

to technical curriculum subjects in girls' schools, the idea that girls feel less confident in technical roles or the perception that engineering is more "suitable" for boys.

Although the reality is very different, the stereotype of an engineer lies somewhere between a rigger-boot wearing foreman and a bespectacled, flannel-shirt clad, middle-aged man. It is a reasonable assumption that many young women may have difficulty picturing themselves in this job, imagining themselves as engineers. Therefore, the importance of female role models and the visibility of women in engineering cannot be underestimated. They help girls visualise themselves in these jobs.

Every profession has their bias and this is definitely true for engineers and scientists. We begin to have an unquestioning trust in technology, science, progress. We've studied this shit and know what we are talking about... But this certainty in our ability can surface as arrogance towards others. In Ireland, the main forces in the engineering sector supported nuclear power at Carnsore Point (in the late 1970s/early 80s), they continue to support the Shell Corrib gas project, push road transport over rail travel, and probably believe that we need another construction boom. An environment such as this is a difficult place for a minority to establish itself – to recognise shared experiences, to seek out and express solidarity. The majority do not want to be challenged. Unfortunately, it is not just male engineers that can display this air of, almost dutiful, self-importance.

Rather than supporting other young women starting in the sector and taking some responsibility, some female engineers deny the problem even exists; afraid of being labelled "disadvantaged", they are very slow to acknowledge their own minority status.

Changes are required, whether it is targeted support for female engineering students (such as the WAVES project in DIT, a support/social network for female engineering students); more family-friendly or flexible office policies; greater acknowledgement of women's contribution to engineering (historical and current); or a zero-tolerance approach to gender stereotyping and

discrimination in the work place. For the overall organisational culture in engineering companies and faculties to transform, changes are required in society generally. The paltry representation of women in the fields engineering and science is undeniably directly connected to women's general position in society. Sustaining the attitude that some things are men's work and other things women's is central to the continued oppression and discrimination that women and girls face globally.

I'm happy I chose this profession and enjoy my job. It's strange to admit but after years of study and work being in a 9% minority has somehow become normal and everyday for me. But 9% is not equal, it is not balanced and it is just not good enough. Encourage your daughters to discover and enjoy maths and science – to examine, to explore and to investigate. They (and we) will thank you for it.



When I wrote an article on Women in Engineering for the Engineers Journal, the magazine of the Institute of Engineers of Ireland, a year ago, I did a lot of reading on this topic. They didn't print it in the end, which was a little disappointing, but here are some interesting things I learned:

*In one study, teachers, much to their own surprise, were shown to be more inclined to motivate young boys struggling with maths while accepting for the same girls that well, maybe, maths just wasn't their thing. A common pattern is that teachers subconsciously pay boys more attention and allow them to take up more space. Not everyone will be good at maths but all children should be given equal encouragement irrespective of their gender.

*The most recent salary survey in Ireland showed that on graduation young female engineers could expect to earn on average 6.6% less than their male counterparts and for female chartered engineers with 3-5 years experience this margin stretches to 14.4%.

* Sweden is fairing much better than most in addressing the issues of maths and science education and gender inequality.

* In Ireland, girls who study physics represent just 4% of all students who complete secondary school. Between 2002 and 2008, there was a worrisome decline in female participation at the postdoctoral, senior research and academic levels in two third-level physics departments studied.

* In some former soviet states where policies encouraged a focus on technology and productivity, it had the knock on impact of improving gender equality in these sectors. However, this has since decreased. The fall in women working in this industry is also linked to the withdrawal of free kindergartens.

* One report reported that some girls now studying engineering had actually been advised against it by their career guidance teachers in school.

* An older colleague of mine offered one explanation. He suggested that in the past, people who were interested in change, turning their back on ways of the past and seeking something new, didn't enter professions such as engineering. So perhaps the sector has attracted a disproportional number of squares!.

" SUSTAINING THE ATTITUDE THAT SOME THINGS ARE MEN'S WORK AND OTHER THINGS WOMEN'S IS CENTRAL TO THE CONTINUED OPPRESSION AND DISCRIMINATION THAT WOMEN AND GIRLS FACE GLOBALLY."

What is Bent Bars?

BB is a queer* prisoner solidarity project based in Britain that was set up this year (2009). At the moment it's essentially a letter writing project to set up pen pals between queer people outside of the prison system and queer people inside the prison system; to build solidarity and links between queer communities across prison walls. The people who set up the project had been involved before in supporting political prisoners, but the prison system itself is a political system. There are many communities of people who are overrepresented within the prison system to the same degree that they're marginalised outside of prison. Having been involved in queer activism and queer communities, this was just another aspect of the work that we want to do. The project also comes from the perspective of prison abolition. This is really important to the project.

Why is prison abolition a queer or a feminist issue?

Well- the homophobia, the misogyny and the racism that's institutionalised within the prison system and the so-called criminal justice system is the same that exists more broadly in society. It's what leads to social exclusion, marginalisation and criminalisation of those people. They're not separate issues. So prison abolition is a queer issue and a feminist issue because queers are overrepresented in the prison system. A disproportionate number of queers who experience poverty, homelessness or unemployment, are vulnerable to violence and arrest. I think there are a huge number of misconceptions about who's in prison and why they're in prison. In terms of the BB project, and the letters we've received from people inside it becomes immediately apparent that so many people who have been criminalised and are inside are there because of poverty, because of class, because of mental health and that over the years these issues have lead to them being in the position that they're in.



Bent Bars

Eve chats to Susan a member of the London based Bent Bars project about supporting queer prisoners and the movement to abolish prisons

“so many people who have been criminalised and are inside are there because of poverty, because of class, because of mental health”

It's about looking at those issues of social exclusion and unpicking the whole system of which prisons are just one part.

So what does the group do? How are you organised?

We have a small collective of people based in London but we've done some outreach across Britain and Ireland to widen the number of people involved. We have regular small collective meetings and letter writing nights. The main focus of the project at the moment is setting up pen pals between prisoners and those currently outside. We're really looking to build long term links between people. Some people might have had experience of supporting prisoners in the short term, sending card of support or one off letters. This project is more about setting up pen pals where people write to each other in a more ongoing sustainable way and really build up trust and support and get

to know people and give them a more sustained level of support and connection. We're really looking for pen pals on the outside. We currently have about 160 people who have contacted us from within the prison system looking to be matched up with a long term pen pal. We initially advertised in *Inside Times*, a newspaper which goes out to all the prisons in Britain and we got a really strong response to that first advert. As far as we're aware now news about about us is spreading by word of mouth within the prisons, especially in prisons where prisoners are organising on the inside to set up their own independent formal or informal support groups. The focus of the project is to set up support and resources for

prisoners who in absolutely no way have the same access to resources as queer people do outside of prison in terms of issues like coming out, safety, sexual health. We're producing a newsletter to provide support for prisoners by prisoners. We put a call out to all the prisoners who had contacted us, asking them to write to us about the issue of coming out in prison and we've had about 20 submissions which are really, really powerful. We're putting that together and we'd like to follow it up with other newsletters and resources led by the needs that prisoners identify.

How can people find out about or get involved in the project?

We have a website with information and resources at <http://www.co-re.org/joomla/index.php/bent-bars>. If you would like to find out more about the project or get matched up with a pen pal you can contact us through the website. We have resources and tips on writing to prisoners. We are also happy to advise people who are interested in setting up similar projects in their own areas. Our email address is bent.bars.project@gmail.com

See also *Communities of Resistance an initiative opposing prison expansion in Britain* at: <http://www.co-re.org/joomla/>

Traveller Women at the Forefront of Change

words by Aoife
images by Sarah

prominent female Traveller activists interviewed

Confusions and fictions about the lives, cultures and histories of Irish Travellers abound. Media reports are most often negative and can border on the hysterical. Documented histories, where they exist, are often politically motivated, as the government refuses to recognise Travellers as an ethnic minority, despite vociferous demands by many Traveller organisations and Traveller-only groups. Travellers have a long history of having their culture ignored or denied by the majority Irish population. After centuries of oppression of Travellers, gypsies and other nomadic groups in Ireland and Britain¹, very little is known by the non-Traveller Irish about the other indigenous ethnic group with whom the island is shared. It is not even clear how many Travellers live in Ireland, or how many regularly travel between Britain and Ireland. Some Travellers living on the side of the road remain undocumented, while some middle-class Travellers in professional jobs choose to 'pass' as settled people due to fear of discrimination and negative stereotyping. The most recent national census records roughly 22,000 Travellers in the republic. However, respondents to an island-wide national health census completed by members of the community employed as Primary Health Care workers² late last year, a much larger 39,000 self-identified as Travellers.

In the public imagination, Traveller women are often portrayed as either romantic throwbacks to a not-so distant past, or as passive victims of the supposed wild, aggressive behaviours of uncouth Traveller men. Yet Traveller women work with Traveller men to fight the discrimination that leaves many without access to basic services such as water, electricity and decent culturally appropriate accommodation. They fight for the health of their communities and for broader educational and employment prospects for themselves and their children. Yet they also challenge patriarchal limitations of their roles and identities as Traveller women and are constantly pushing the boundaries of what it means to be a Traveller woman in today's society.

As a settled woman, I don't claim to speak for Traveller women. Two prominent female Traveller activists agreed to be interviewed for this piece. Rosaleen Mc Donagh is a mature student at Trinity College Dublin with a colourful and varied background in many areas from creative writing to running for the Senate as a Traveller representative, to working on domestic violence issues with Pavee Point (a national organisation promoting Travellers human rights). Her way with words has made me cry as I've listened to her speak. Catherine Joyce, coordinator of Blanchardstown Travellers Development Group CDP, has represented Travellers both nationally and internationally in various roles. She presents as

a force of common sense and pragmatic passion. I hope I can represent them both and their ideas faithfully.

even unconsciously Travellers are politically aware

Traveller women are at the forefront of positive change in the Traveller community. The female voice most often represents Travellers in the community and at national level. Catherine feels that Traveller women are "a little bit unique in the fact that, even within the political debate around Traveller issues, it's very often the women who are actively engaged in the policy stuff and involved in the discussions around what happens with Travellers." She adds, "They're not as much in a vulnerable position as the majority population."

"I think because our lives have been so politicised, whether that be by Travellers or by the state, I think that even unconsciously Travellers are politically aware. So they know that discrimination impacts upon them because their child can't go to school, whereas that mightn't be as evident in the community that isn't under threat."

Travellers often live in large family groupings. There is often minimal integration between Travellers and their settled neighbours, due to a combination of the importance of family, lifestyle choice and enforced marginalisation. Women, generally, tend to take on tasks in the community that relate to the business of family. Traveller women are the ones who negotiate with the doctors and who liaise with community services. They meet with the shopkeepers and their children's teachers. This has meant, as Catherine explains, that "in return, I suppose, it's often the women who experience the most negative, blatant discrimination against Travellers, because it's the women who are dealing with the services that are racist towards Travellers". Though "maybe it wasn't always done with a political motive or agenda in mind," Catherine explains, "I think it's created the situation where women have had to respond."

"Without undermining the engagement of Traveller men and their active involvement, if you look at the political situation and the representation of Travellers across the country, very often you'll find that it's Traveller women who play the dominant role - whether it's the running of local programmes, managing organisations, or whether it's as the recipients on training programmes."

Rosaleen expands on the differing political roles of Traveller men and women. "[Women are] still very much the custodians of Traveller culture in so many ways that men are not. We're the ones that teach our children about Traveller culture."

we've had our own quiet revolution

It is in this domestic sphere that there has been the most significant change in the lives of Traveller Women in recent decades, according to Rosaleen. "Nobody knows what we've done," she says, "We've had our own quiet revolution and no one knows about it. I would never underestimate Traveller women's knowledge about themselves or what they've done. In some ways some women have been totally liberated. They've made all sorts of choices around how they live their lives, their marriages. Their relationships with their husbands would be different from their mother's. All that's not a big revolution but it's big in somebody's life. It all adds up to a bigger picture. I think that's real liberation." These achievements have not come at the cost of subsuming their cultural identity to that of settled women. The biggest gains for Traveller women concerns "honouring and loving their identity, being proud and being able to carry their head to a new generation, being able to adapt old values and old traditions with new possibilities. Maybe a woman feels that cultural norms or values don't always sit easy with [her] ideas of liberation," Rosaleen admits, "but that's part of the tension of human development."

feminism can be stretched and pulled and interpreted to suit any women

Rosaleen feels that settled women often don't appreciate such aspects of Traveller women's lives. "We are either invisible or passive victims of our own culture. They don't realise that a lot of Traveller women are active, and have different strategies about managing sexism and other gendered roles. There's certain values that make me proud to be a Traveller woman. Modesty and my body around morality and sexuality. Settled women would think it's very oppressed, but I don't. Well, some of it is, but some of it is not."

As more and more Traveller women benefit from education, she expects this will be explored and articulated in the broader society. "I do think that in the next ten years you'll see more and more Traveller women writing about it."

She shares a story from her childhood, where she also failed to appreciate an important aspect of her mother's life, one which embarrassed her at the time. "When I was a kid, my mother went begging to settled women," she recounts. "And for years and years and years, it'd drive me bananas. I remember asking my mother, 'Why do you beg? We don't need to do it. We don't need second hand shite!' Her mother's answer taught her more about feminism and solidarity than any text book could. 'I've never taken anything off them,' her mother explained, 'Because they had nothing to give. Only their time and their conversation.' This ritual was about much more than begging. It was about friendships with some of the women she went to the houses of. It was about that connection. So I suppose, I like the idea that feminism can be stretched and pulled and interpreted to suit any women, not just middle class academics."

Rosaleen continues, "Globally, I think minority women are always experiencing every single type of sexism and racism. I think Travellers are like that too. My family lived in London for a while. We had Asian neighbours, and I felt Asian culture is very similar to ours. I think Asian women get criticised for getting married too early, having arranged marriages, for being passive but beautiful, for being monogamous. All that stuff we're told we are, that we're kind of old-fashioned. However, the Asian community has managed to sell and own their identity and present it in a more more exotic way than we have."

"In terms of domestic violence, there are strategies they have used which we have borrowed. The idea that a refuge is a respite. Traveller women often get criticised by service providers: 'You don't leave your husband. You're back in the refuge 12 or 14 times.' Asian women have said, 'Look honey, I'm managing the way I'm managing. Even if I come back 40 times, I still deserve the same quality of service where I can make choices about how I want to manage my life.'"

don't pretend
we're all the
same, we're all in
it together, we're
not.

"Women at the best of times, we're very hard on each other. Very, very hard. I don't think settled women realise what they've done or what they've said about us. [They don't understand] how difficult it is, particularly about cultural stuff like marriage and domestic violence and sexuality. The way they'd think of those elements about Traveller women and say, 'Well you're not quite up to scratch. You haven't quite made the grade of feminism.' They don't realise that we haven't had the twenty or thirty years that Irish women have in terms of education and organisation."

"Don't try and pretend we're all the same, we're all in it together. We're not. The settled women who work with Traveller women don't always recognise they're quite oppressive and patronising. I remember last year we were at a education seminar. There was a Traveller-only space and I remember this [settled] woman said 'They're my Travellers. They can't be on their own.' On one level you want to laugh. But the really sad part of that was the Traveller women walked away with her. There's a whole culture of dependency."

"I don't like that we're dependent on settled people and the way that our history has made us feel that way. And then if we criticise we're told, 'oh you're anti-settled.' I'm not anti-anything. I think that we need to do some stuff by ourselves and we need to take responsibility. You can't go running to settled people all the time."

"It's much more than how other groups of women see us; it's about how we see ourselves. Put it this way. As a disabled woman, I'm suppose to aspire to be able-bodied. That's what I'm told. I would reject all that. As a Traveller woman I'm supposed to aspire, not to be settled (though there's a bit of that), but this idea that settled women are better than us, or that they're more capable or more confident, more self-assured... more arrogant I would say!"

"But that said, there have been really good settled women who

have stayed with Travellers and have sowed seeds in people's heads. And some settled women have been graceful enough to stand back and let Traveller women take the space. There are settled women who have stuck with me and stood up to the challenge, and challenged me as well. 'Ok, you wanted your space, now what are you going to do with it?'"

they feel they should have some say

"If you take away the Primary Health Care programmes, or the work in Traveller programmes, the Traveller political agenda doesn't really exist outside that," Catherine explains. Yet, Traveller-only organisations, such as Minceir Misli in the 1980s and current groups such as Travellers-for-Travellers and Minceir Whidden are making progress in articulating the Traveller voice.

They struggle with lack of funds and the slow set-up process of debates and decisions which characterise many new organisations. Being Traveller-only, they represent a significant break from the perception of Travellers as dependent on the structures of the settled community. Yet, referring to Minceir Whidden, Catherine finds that tension arises from the attitudes of some of the settled people who work with Travellers.

"The thing that threatens them more than anything else is that they're not part of it. They feel that they have a right to be. Even the most politically-minded people would be of threat because they feel they should have some say about what's going on in there. I've heard people from Traveller organisations say, 'Well why is this needed? Why are we supporting it? Why are Traveller organisations expected to fund Travellers to meet Travellers?' I think it's because people feel threatened by it. They think, well is this Travellers coming together to talk about us? ... to talk about our inaccuracies?"

The huge difficulty in this lack of support, or indeed, opposition, relates to the centrality of the infrastructure of Traveller organisations, Traveller education and training programmes and Traveller Community Development Projects across the country to the lives of many Traveller families. In fact, community projects are the biggest employers of Travellers, a fact pointed out by protesters marching against recent planned government cuts across the community sector³.

organisations are guilty of looking at the Traveller issue and not segregating the different elements of it

This situation tells us something about the prioritisation of issues affecting Traveller women. "I think one of the difficulties probably all Traveller organisations are guilty of is looking at the Traveller issue and not segregating the different elements of it. The priorities tend to be set by organisations that are working with Travellers, not the individuals that are working within those organisations, and I think as a result of that, they tend to be the general issues that affect Travellers, such as education or health. It's very hard to segregate the women's aspect to the Traveller aspect and no real thinking has gone into that, with the exception of looking at employment and some of the service provision. The role of women in Irish society or within the Traveller society isn't something that gets widely discussed or debated."

"Traveller women [don't have] a real steered agenda around Traveller feminism. I think it's unrealistic to expect the feminist

movement in Ireland or the other women's organisations to be able to champion Traveller women's causes when we haven't completely worked out our own."

"In fairness to the feminist movement, there have been cases where they've championed the Traveller issues or Traveller causes. For example, around the campaign to get the segregated social welfare office on Castle St. in Dublin closed down, the only one left in Ireland. The National Women's Council really rode in behind that campaign and actively engaged with Traveller organisations, looking at how it particularly impacted on women and children. But that was because it had a clear, straight strategy and agenda."

without community, we can't progress

Catherine feels that looking internally at the Traveller Community is also a priority. "Within the Traveller community ourselves, we've looked at trying to challenge some of the inaccuracies and inequalities in our own communities, particularly around underage marriages, and the role of women within the Traveller community. I think that Traveller projects have done a lot in terms of challenging some of this stuff, from the point of view that women

are out of the home and they're working. They're in training programmes and men have to take on some of the other stuff. It might be very simple things, but they're huge, trying to change the attitudes and the perceptions of men and the expectations of what women are doing and supposed to." She pauses to consider this, "There's a long way to go!"

There is something important in the idea of community which signifies a real difference between Traveller and non-Traveller approaches to feminism, for Rosaleen. "The difference with us is, without community, we can't progress. We can't progress if work isn't done with men as well. In order for women to develop, men's ideas of femininity and power need to be explored, whereas settled women don't have to think about that the way we would."

"I mean that in order for the community to challenge sexism, men have to understand what sexism is. And they have to learn a different way. We know what sexism is, and they need to be brought along. They need to stand up and say, 'I want something more for my sister, my partner.' I don't mean to seem watered down -it doesn't mean I'm not a feminist! I know that's not very 'political'," she laughs, "but that's what it is!"

Endnotes

¹ This historical timeline relates mainly to Britain, yet is well researched and concise: grthm.co.uk/timeline.php

² Across the country, Traveller women are working as Community Health Workers to address the specific health issues and needs of the Travelling Community. See www.paveepoint.ie/progs_health.html for more information.

³ <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2009/1001/1224255613725.html>

Words by
holly

Childhood obesity

Images by
Liz Greenfield

unconstrained marketing of products that lead directly to health problems.

Around €130m is spent on food and drink advertising in Ireland every year. Products high in fat, sugar, salt, or all three, make up 88 per cent of this. The fight to win children as lifetime consumers begins at a very young age. Money hungry food companies see children as highly profitable cash cows. The food industry

knows only too well that these master minds of parent control have a hand in the pocket of the weekly food shopping.

In the home, many factors contribute to children's dietary behaviour, including how much money is available to spend on food. Healthy food costs more in deprived areas. No matter how good the level of access, the poorest ultimately cannot afford the healthiest diet, and when access to large shopping centres is limited, healthy food prices are extortionate. The skills of those buying and preparing food is hugely important, if you've ever had over boiled, over salted cabbage you'll know what I'm on about. Practical constraints within the household have a huge impact on diet, time assigned to meals, adequacy of facilities for preparation, cooking and storage. Many families no longer have a designated place to eat, like a dining table. Where we eat, like in front of a television and slumped on a couch, also

have negative consequences. Not concentrating on what your eating makes your body less likely to feel full.

Outside the home, there's a lot of work to be done to protect children from the hands of the food industry, creeping into school vending machines and tuck shops. Almost three quarters of Irish schools sell confectionary. Tempting children with sugary drinks, sweets, chocolate bars and crisps. The HSE (Health Services Executive) have made guidelines for schools on implementing healthy eating policies, but the reality is that some schools have well formed policies while in others healthy eating programmes are non-existent. Children have a profound influence on each other too, so even if your talents as a parent ensure your child has a healthy diet, the veggie-hating group mentality that exists in many children might put a cuileog in the siúcra.

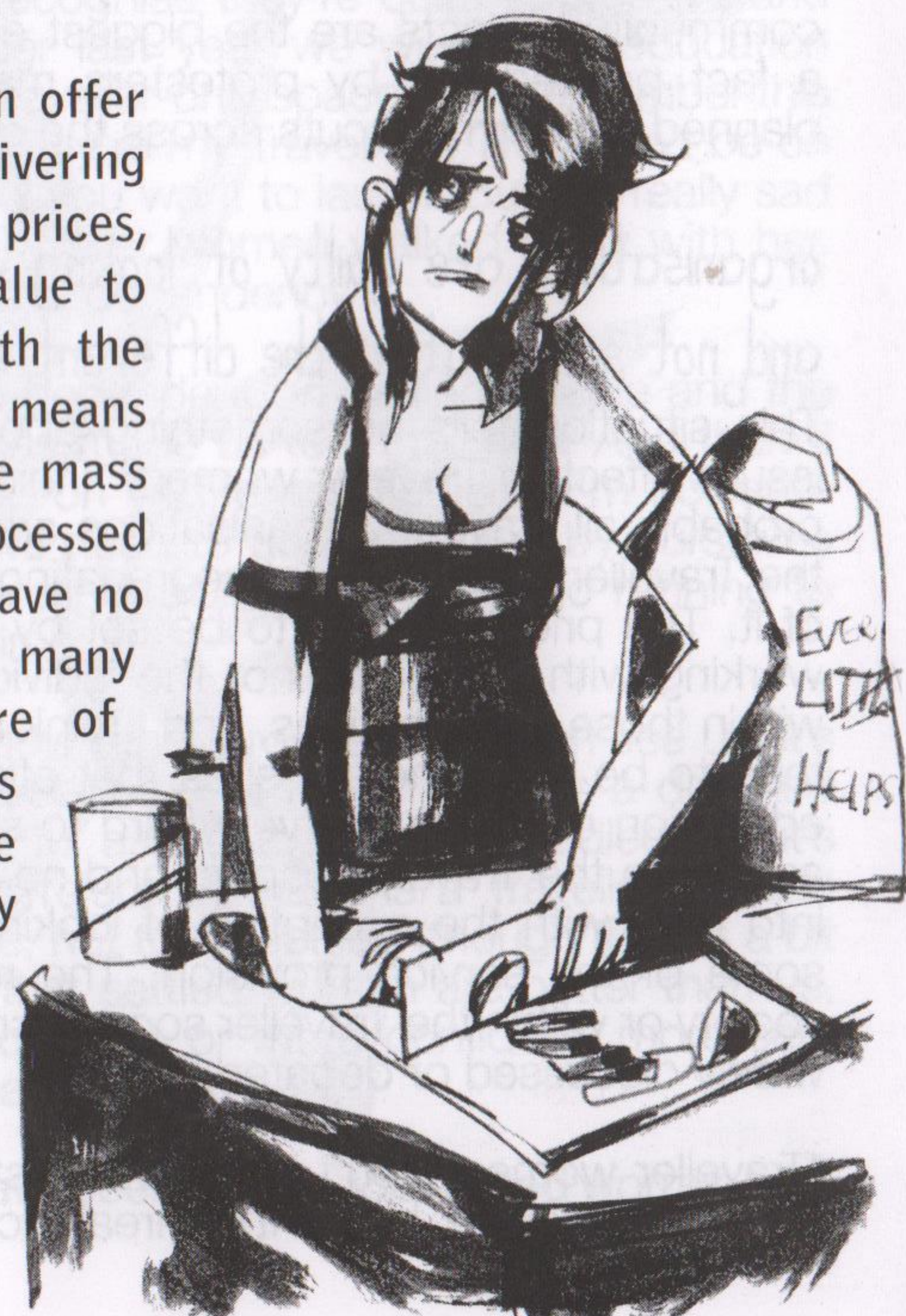
So much of what's on offer to us is based on delivering calories at cheap prices, leaving nutritional value to the side. People with the lowest economical means are dependant on the mass production of processed foods. Urban areas have no access to fresh food, many children are unaware of where natural foods come from before the factory, or what they look and taste like. Nationally, there is a lack of education surrounding nutrition too, one

which had lead us not to question why most of the food we are sold contains no nutrients,

Mothers are typically bearing the brunt of the criticisms of obesity in children. This is an important issue because children are choiceless and in many ways, parents only really have an illusion of choice. In a world where high sugar, high fat foods are being used to encourage healthier living, it is unsurprising that parents and children find it hard to make healthy choices

Government initiatives to promote healthier eating are useless unless they're going to give out the cash for the food too. It is important that we all recognise the negative impact of food imbalance on communities, and start demanding equal access to healthy and nutritious food!

SMASH THE STEAK!



PROSTITUTION IN IRELAND

Words by Marianne
Image by Sarah

A matter of choice?

I first became interested in the politics surrounding prostitution around the time I began working in homeless services in Dublin. A few months before I started in this line of work, Tobie interviewed Ana Lopez from the International Union of Sex Workers for The Rag #1, and this raised some discussion within our group. We had previously held some discussions about sex work and watched Live Nude Girls Unite (a film about the unionisation of sex workers in San Francisco). We all viewed the film with great interest -- unionising sex workers, going on strike, getting better working conditions in the Lusty Lady peep show theatre -- these women were awesome and inspiring. I started to think about an anarchist perspective on sex work, coming from a non-moralistic feminist viewpoint. It was very appealing to hear these new (to me) ideas, as in Ireland the conservative Catholic ideology is prevalent in all areas of media debate. To challenge the view of prostitutes-as-victims, and to look at sex workers as workers like any other, fits in nicely with the anarchist framework. But things are never that simple.

In my job I meet many women who work in prostitution, both on the streets and by phone arrangements, and I have seen second-hand some of the damage and the rewards that come with it. Almost all of the drug-using women in the shelter work in prostitution and the one or two who don't have a much harder time trying to support their habit. Some women come home having made more in an hour or two than I would make during my 10 hour shift and others earn money just by keeping lonely, elderly, or mentally disabled men company for a few hours. I have also caught a glimpse of another side to the job. On countless occasions women are attacked while out working and many never tell us what happened. One woman came home beaten so badly by a punter she was barely recognisable; it was hard to get the picture of her face out of my mind. She went out working again a few days later wearing a huge pair of sunglasses and caked in make-up, asking me how she looked as she left. Countless times, when I worked the night-shift, women would run in the door, saying nothing, crying or with a noticeable injury like a split lip. Recently one woman was abducted for the night, held in a truck and barely escaped serious harm. I could go on. This, to me, was not a job like any other.

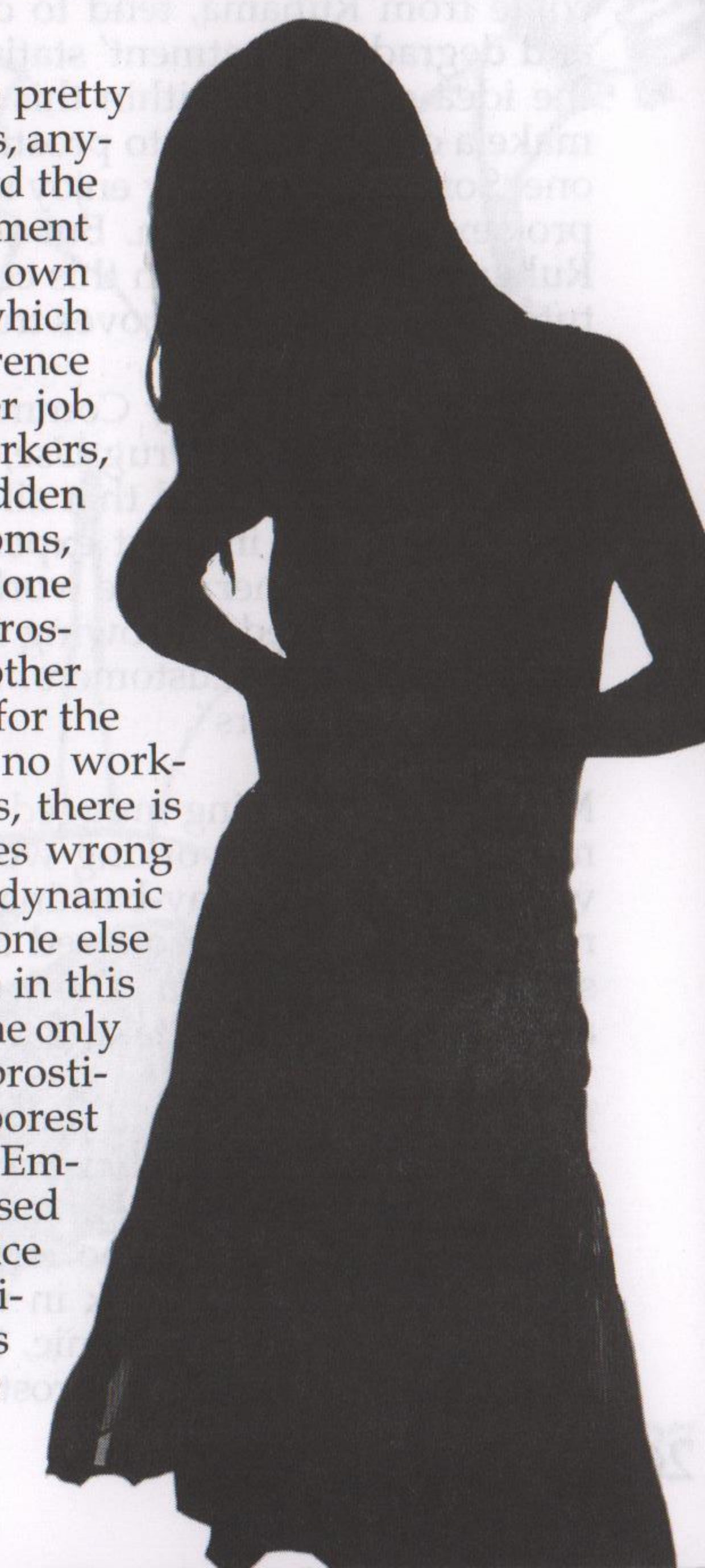
Coming face to face with women who work on the streets in Dublin changed a few things about my view on prostitution. Firstly, I saw that it cannot be lumped in under the vague term 'sex work' along with phone sex, stripping and working in the porn industry. There is some level of safety on the telephone, behind a glass screen, or on a stage with bouncers around. The same level of physical danger as comes with prostitution is normally not present in these situations. Even being in a brothel may offer some level of safety in comparison with on-street sex work. Secondly, I realised that anyone who has the power to unionise, and make a film or write a book about their experiences, is coming from a privileged position and has not much in common with drug-using sex workers. To me, when reading some pro-sex work articles, this position of privilege is clear. Imagine a fashion designer writing an article about the lives of women who make clothes. What about the poverty, the addictions, the violence? It is easier to speak about choice when there are other options open to you.

I continued to read stories and articles by women and men who worked as 'sex workers' and by 'pro-sex' feminists. Many were really interesting, challenging the problems of lumping everyone into one category. Others seemed to be writing purely in reac-

tion to anti-prostitution feminism, claiming prostitution is a key to empowerment and liberation for women. I watched a great French documentary called La Putain de Compile, I would definitely recommend watching it if you are interested in different views on sex work. Prostitution is a very complex issue and one which divides feminists bitterly. The idea of writing something that questions a 'pro-sex' view is intimidating. I mean, I'm pro-sex! But does that have to mean I'm pro all prostitution or that I think all prostitution is empowering for all the women engaged in it, all of the time? Women and men from privileged backgrounds and education can use this position to write a thesis or article, make films, speak out about how sex work is empowering, just another job, just a stigmatised word. Although I have never engaged in sex-work, I know this is not always true. There are dangers to face working in street prostitution that most people going out to work in other jobs would never dream of.

Many compare prostitution to homosexuality as two stigmatised sexual practices, both examples of laws interfering with sex between two consenting adults. This is used as an argument for legalising prostitution. On a basic level I can see why this comparison could be made, but when you look at the money and power involved you see a different perspective. Sex between two consenting adults is one thing, but if you bring the coercive power of money into the equation and the power dynamic changes. Paid and unpaid work are very different things. Helping a friend to paint their house is a very different dynamic to being paid by a stranger to paint. It is a financial interaction. To look at prostitution purely as a sexual interaction between two consenting parties ignores the reality of power and control that comes with having money or with needing it.

On paper, prostitution looks like pretty ideal work: you are your own boss, anyone can do it, the pay is great, and the hours flexible. No initial investment is needed; all you need is your own body. Yet there are many things which make it less than ideal. One difference between sex work and any other job is that it is illegal. For street workers, their job usually takes place in hidden places, laneways, cars, hotel rooms, or a stranger's house. There is no one else present to look out for you. Prostitutes often look out for each other but cannot be physically present for the majority of the time. There are no workplace health and safety measures, there is no sick pay, and if anything goes wrong you have very little back up. The dynamic of being paid to do what someone else wants is not an empowering one in this situation. But its illegality is not the only issue. Even in countries where prostitution is legal it tends to be the poorest women who work in this area. Empowerment in sex work is supposed to come through making a choice to have sex. Some 'pro-sex feminists' even refer to prostitution as the opposite of rape, because the woman is choosing to have sex



Recommended reading:

Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labour by Wendy Chapkis
Prostitution and Feminism: Towards a Politics of Feeling by Maggie O'Neill
Some Mother's Daughter by the International Prostitute's Collective
Prostitution Power and Freedom by Julia O'Connell Davidson
Temporarily yours: Intimacy, Authenticity, and the Commerce of Sex by Elizabeth Bernstein
Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy by Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (Editors)
Lyn: A Story of Prostitution by Lyn Madden and June Levine
Rocket Queen by Janet (Zine)
Drug Users, Sex work and the Risk Environment in Dublin NACD Report May 2009

Films:

Live Nude Girls Unite
La Putain de Compile

where and when she wants, and charging for it. But the element of choice is questionable if you need the money, and you would do almost anything to get it.

What's going on in Ireland?

I tried to find out more about the situation in Dublin. A report published by the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies in Trinity College Dublin states that, "In the Irish context, it has been found that those engaged in prostitution have also lacked other alternatives, thus choice becomes subsumed as an issue by the necessity to eat, live and provide shelter for oneself and one's family".

Information about the numbers of women involved in prostitution is difficult to get, as many work from home or only work occasionally. Those on the streets are the most visible and easily counted. They also get the most media attention. Women working from their houses or other places may have more of a choice in whether they work, how much they work and what they will or will not do for cash. But we have to find a place in the debate for homeless, drug-using, street workers, as often these are the women who don't have access to means of expression. Ruhama, a Dublin-based organisation working with women in prostitution claim that 95% of women working on the streets are drug users, mainly using heroin and cocaine. From speaking to women at work this seems fairly accurate; they would say most are drug users. However Ruhama are a religious organisation with an anti-prostitution stance. They are one of the only groups doing research specifically around prostitution and trafficking, although other groups such as Chrysalis are working with the women directly. Writings about Irish prostitution, which mainly come from Ruhama, tend to describe prostitution as 'inhuman and degrading treatment' stating this as a reason not to consider the idea of choice within this context. But I believe people can make a choice to go into prostitution and that this can be a valid one. Some women may enjoy sex work or find it empowering as pro-sex feminists claim. But some women do not, especially if Ruhama's claim, that in this country the vast majority of prostitutes are drug-users, proves true.

The National Advisory Commission on Drugs (NACD), in a recent report entitled Drug Use, Sex Work and the Risk Environment in Dublin, found that all of the participants in their study had "direct and indirect experience of physical and sexual assault by a customer while working on the streets...The men and women recounted harrowing narratives of aggression, violence and brutality from customers...[the] majority also reported being raped by customers".

Many reported being mugged regularly, women reported being mugged by other working women and some of the men interviewed reported 'gay-bashing'. Those interviewed stated that more money is often offered for more risky behaviour such as sex without a condom. The women who need the money most are at the most risk of taking these chances.

In Ireland, stigma around prostitution is huge. For many women I work with this is a daily issue. Their families, friends, and even other women in the shelter make insulting comments about them. For some their families no longer want any contact with them. Some do not want to link in with services available, including the mobile methadone clinic, because they are associated with admitting to working in prostitution. It also means that many

street workers do not report attacks or rapes. The NACD report states that "the main risk produced by this stigma/shame was an unwillingness to report incidences to the gardai [Irish police] because of embarrassment, which means the perpetrator goes undetected". To begin to tackle the stigma attached to prostitution would go a huge way towards trying to make the lives of street workers safer.

Another huge issue is drug addiction. In a section of the NACD report entitled 'Entering Sex Work', it was found that all of the participants in their survey were dependent drug users before they began engaging in sex work. For the women involved, it was simply the most obvious way to make the money to buy drugs. That's a whole other article in itself, the illegality of class A drugs goes a huge way towards creating an underground life that centres around finding the money to buy drugs (usually illegally), buying them (illegally), and finding places to use them (illegally), all of which are made more dangerous by the constant threat of arrest. But while drugs are a huge issue, the fact that Chrysalis find more women working on the streets coming up to Christmas than any other time of year shows us that financial pressure of any kind is a huge motivator in pushing women into street work.

The current law, Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) 1993, means that soliciting, loitering for the purposes of prostitution, running a brothel, and making money from the proceeds of prostitution are illegal. In reality very few charges are pressed for loitering or anything else. According to Ivana Bacik:

"What the law seeks to do is protect society from the more intrusive, public aspects of prostitution, such as soliciting on the streets. The laws governing prostitution are, therefore, primarily public order offences and are not designed to protect women."

While this is certainly true and the laws are mostly used just to move prostitution away from the more central areas of the city, the relationship between the police and the working women is not always a bad one. In the NACD report, some of the interviewees, particularly the female ones, report a good relationship with the gardai who look out for them if they are in trouble. In reality, most of those working in street prostitution will only occasionally be picked up for loitering. However many report the gardai as being "prejudiced and judgemental" in dealing with them.

So what's wrong with the current situation in Ireland? As I've discussed, there is very little protection offered for street workers and very little understanding of why these women are out working. One woman describes in the NACD report "it's like they don't give a fuck about us, they think that they are only sluts or dirty prostitutes". Doing work that is not only illegal, but also seen as shameful or immoral, means these women are not given the legal protection or workers rights that other workers are. While we consider that prostitution may be a good choice for some women, we also need to consider that there are many women who are harmed by it, whether this harm comes in the form of physical/sexual violence, lowered self esteem or repercussions from the stigma attached in Irish society.

What are other countries doing?

Solutions suggested for the current situation include, abolition, decriminalisation of prostitution combined with criminalisation of buyers (Swedish model), and legalisation (of both buying and selling - like in Amsterdam). Abolition I won't dwell on as there is no reason to, trying to ban prostitution is about the worst thing you could do to prostitutes as it drives them even further underground. It is unlikely that prostitution will ever cease to exist under capitalism. However, if people's basic need were met everyone would have greater choice about what kind

of work they would like to do.

The Swedish model is the one most favoured by Irish feminists, with the National Women's Council (NWC) calling for a similar system to be introduced. But, while it decriminalises prostitution, it criminalises the buyers, focusing on 'kerb-crawlers'. Most reports say that the levels of prostitution have fallen. However, according to the Swedish Collective of Prostitutes, these laws drive prostitution into more hidden areas and give women less time to decide whether to take a client or not. The decision has to be made quickly in case they are spotted. In the report from

the International Prostitutes Collective in London in 2004 the Swedish women reported:

"People on the street, that is the most vulnerable, have been hit hardest. The good clients are gone, only the bad clients are left. Before the women can say no to the bad dangerous clients, and they had a thirty second period to talk with them before they jumped into the car -- they can't afford that any more. The police, social workers, everybody says violence has increased."

The Swedish model also works on a buyer-as-exploiter, prostitute-as-victim basis which is not always true to reality. As the NWC newsletter explains, "...what the Swedish public and legislature already understood profoundly. Prostitution is a form of male violence against women. The exploiter/buyers need to be punished, and the victim/prostitutes need to be helped." The prostitutes collectives would see this as patronizing, not seeing the women as agents but purely as victims.

The English Collective of Prostitutes look for a model similar to that introduced in New Zealand in 2003 which they say "removes prostitution from criminal law, allows people to work together collectively, and distinguishes between violence and consenting sex.". According to the New Zealand Prostitutes Collective, the new laws allow women to refuse sex with a client by

law, it makes coercion illegal, women do not have to register but can remain anonymous, condoms/dental dams must be used and fines are in place to enforce this. Operator Certificates are needed for

"To challenge the view of prostitutes-as-victims, and to look at sex workers as workers like any other, fits in nicely with the anarchist framework. But things are never that simple."

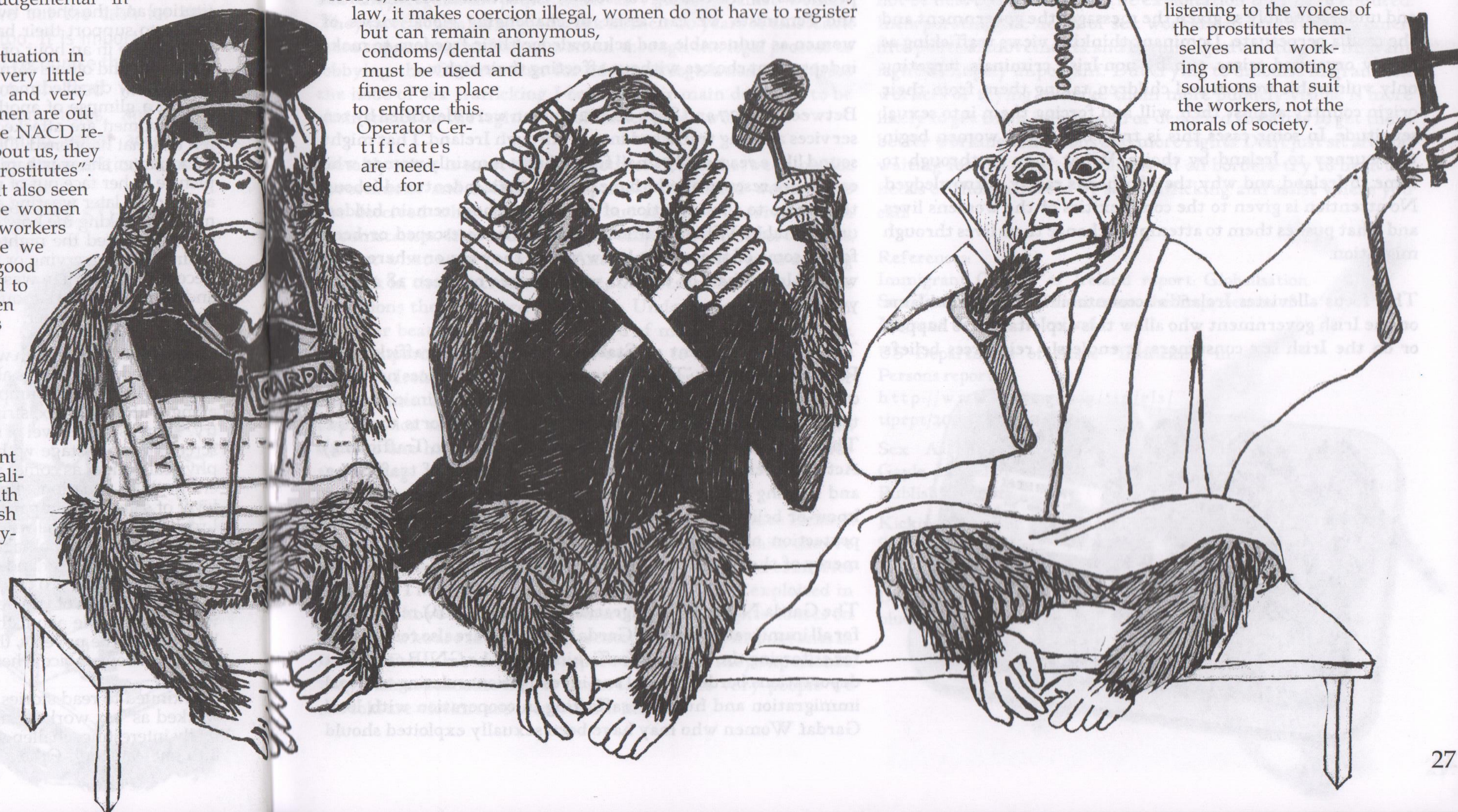
all brothel operators but up to four women can work together without one. State benefits are immediately available to women wanting to leave prostitution and the laws around the under age sex workers are strict. However all sex workers in New Zealand must be from New Zealand. This makes it different from the Netherlands where women go from around the world to work in prostitution.

So what can we work towards here in Ireland?

In their 14 point plan, the English Collective of Prostitutes names reinstating welfare payment to minors in the UK as the single most important step towards preventing prostitution in minors. Ireland has just cut the social welfare payment to those under 20 by half, leaving these young people to live on only €100 a week in a very expensive country. It is likely this will be further reduced. Cuts and the downturn in the economy are hitting the poorest people the most. More women will become homeless and more will turn to prostitution. Support services will be reduced at the same time due to funding cuts. It is important that we fight against these cuts.

The NACD report offers a range of suggestions for the government and support service providers on how to tackle the complex needs of drug-using sex workers. They mention educating the gardai about the needs of those working in prostitution, and the use of harm reduction as a strategy both for agencies working with sex-workers and in governmental policy. One thing that they mention briefly, which is probably the root of the problem, is the basic economic and social inequality in society. As long as there is poverty and need, there will be a lack of choice in how we earn money. Ideally no woman or man would have to work in any job they don't want, particularly one as dangerous as on-

street sex work. To get rid of the dangers involved in street working seems an impossible task. We need a drastic change in our laws regarding prostitution. To find the solutions, we need to be listening to the voices of the prostitutes themselves and working on promoting solutions that suit the workers, not the morals of society.



illegal entry

Sex Trafficking in Ireland

words by holly

artwork by julia jacob

Recent years have seen a cultural attitude shift in Ireland, with sex becoming a hot topic. An increased acceptance of sexuality seems to have led a sort of mass complacency regarding the sexual exploitation of women, particularly migrant women. One time in Ireland, there would have been outrage over the crimes committed by traffickers. Now people read about it weekly. Some speculate that this stems from a 'look after our own', or in a word - racist - mentality that the economic recession now fortifies.

Recent research conducted by the Immigrant Council of Ireland found that there is a minimum of 1,000 women in indoor prostitution in Ireland at any one time. Of them, between 87% and 97% are migrant women. That's not to say that they have all been trafficked, but rather the statistics highlight the inseparable connections between prostitution, racism and sexism.

Trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation is one of the most wide-spread forms, but not the only form, of human trafficking in the world. In Ireland it is largely misunderstood, and understandably so given the messages the government and the media perpetuate. Dominant thinking views trafficking as highly organised crime, run by non-Irish criminals, targeting only vulnerable women and children, taking them from their origin country against their will, and forcing them into sexual servitude. In some cases this is true, but many women begin the journey to Ireland by choice. What they go through to come to Ireland, and why they bother, is rarely acknowledged. No attention is given to the complexities of the women's lives, and what pushes them to attempt to change their lives through migration.

This focus alleviates Ireland's accountability, laying no blame on the Irish government who allow this exploitation to happen, or on the Irish sex consumers. It endlessly reinforces beliefs

that no woman in her right mind would wilfully engage in sex work. It also views all sex work as violence and sex workers as victims of such violence; women in need of rescue. Ireland, like many other countries, has an underground economy built on prostitution. The indoor sex industry alone is estimated to be worth over 180 million!

Global gender inequalities have made women most likely to migrate. The burdens of poverty fall more heavily on them, and according to UN estimates, women make up 70 per cent of the world's poor (Monzini 2005). The reasons women want to migrate don't go away when they can't find a legal route. Just because a woman may choose to enter a country illegally, does not make it more acceptable for her to experience violence or exploitation. It is important to not let the fight against trafficking turn into a moral crusade against prostitution. We should advocate for a distinction to be made between forced and voluntary prostitution, one that protects victims and does not doubt them. The right for any woman to work in the sex industry can be established and maintained while tackling the problems of trafficking for sexual exploitation. As anarchists and feminists, we can assist in challenging global views of women as vulnerable, and acknowledge their freedom to make independent choices, without affecting their rights.

Between Jan '07 and Sept '08, 102 women were identified by ten services as being trafficked into or through Ireland. That might sound like a reasonably small figure, but it is mainly women who escape, are rescued or who have paid off their indentured 'labour' that come to the attention of services. Others remain hidden, undetectable. When trafficked women have escaped or been found, some of them don't know where they are, or where they were. Almost half of the 102 women were between 18 and 24 years old.

The US Department of State's annual report Trafficking in Persons states that, "The Government of Ireland does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so." These 'efforts' include, the Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act 2008 being brought in, prohibiting all forms of trafficking, and making it a criminal offence to buy sex off someone you know or believe to be trafficked. This bill failed to address the protection needs of trafficked women, and left them at the mercy of the state.

The Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB), responsible for all immigration-related Garda operations, are also responsible for enforcing the Human Trafficking Act. The GNIB carry out deportations, border control and investigations relating to illegal immigration and human trafficking in cooperation with local Gardaí. Women who may have been sexually exploited should

not be expected to prove their 'victim' status, and it's questionable whether the GNIB are suited to work with trafficked women when they're primarily trained to establish someone's legal status. Many trafficked women will be illegally undocumented in Ireland, for the very reason that they have been trafficked!

Under the new legislation, a Garda superintendent 'assesses' suspected trafficked women. They are left to determine if the woman has been trafficked, and thus, suitable for the 60 day recovery and reflection period. To date, this has only been granted to two women. The GNIB have also been responsible for carrying out a number of brothel raids all over the country, and the true effectiveness of these raids is questionable. Framed as an anti-trafficking measure, raids are often violent, traumatic experiences which usually result in the potential victims of trafficking going through the judicial system, and not the traffickers.

An Anti-Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU) was established to produce the government's National Action Plan (NAP) to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings. In its making, the AHTU carried out discussions with relevant NGOs (non-governmental organisations) to include their insight in developing the NAP. Launched early this summer, the NAP gives an impression that sex trafficking is being taken seriously. Although without evidence of the progress the NAP has made, it's easy to think this is just an attempt to appear as if taking action.

There are a few NGOs trying to combat the growing problem of trafficking in Ireland. Ruhama, a Dublin-based NGO, is the most well known. They work with women involved in prostitution and other forms of commercial sex work, including sex trafficking. Their ethos is based on a Christian perspective which emphasises the value and dignity of every human being, and they regard all prostitution as violence against women. They have done a lot of good work in their 20 years of existence, from supporting trafficked women through the legal process to lobbying the Government for adequate legislation to address the issue of sex trafficking. I believe their main downfall to be their stance on the legitimacy of choice in sex work.

Notably, what is most often left out of debate between media, government and NGOs is that most trafficked women are not deceived when transported, but rather on arrival, when circumstances, like education and employment opportunities, are not what were promised. And for those who were coming to work in the sex trade, the deception lies in the terms of the conditions they're forced to work in. Under current legislation, whether beaten and raped, deprived of money or held captive, if the superintendent believes a woman to have intentionally entered Ireland illegally, she may face criminal charges or deportation. Meanwhile, those who profit from the sexual exploitation and trafficking of women are rarely charged. To date no one has been successfully prosecuted in the courts for trafficking.

Media attention focuses on migrants' illegal entry into Ireland, rather than the crimes committed against them while they're here, or the way the state forcibly returns them to their countries of origin. There are women who've been sexually exploited in Ireland, who've experienced numerous human rights abuses on Irish soil, who are simply being treated like illegal immigrants in Ireland! For these women to report the abuses they experience, they risk criminalisation or deportation. The very people we are told are victims are treated as criminals!

It is not just undocumented migrants that end up in the Irish sex trade. Documented asylum seekers are surviving on a government allowance of €2.73 a day. As asylum seekers, they are not allowed to work in Ireland and are thus more vulnerable to exploitation. If they need more money, their only option is illegal work such as prostitution. The voices of these women will never be heard if reporting what happens to them puts them at risk.

In Ireland trafficking is commonly treated as a crime against the state, not as a human rights violation! The government have formally addressed trafficking. They've implemented laws and are seen to be making efforts to combat sex trafficking. The answers include the tightening of border controls, traumatic brothel raids and deportation of some suspected trafficked women. Within Ireland, despite the National Action Plan, it is not really evident that human rights issues are at heart. Evidently, there are a number of flaws in the government's response to trafficking. Primarily, none of the responses address long-term prevention. Inseparable from prostitution and trafficking, and what should be a main focus of prevention, is demand. The fictional idea of men's uncontrollable sexuality, and men's gendered sense of entitlement, are reinforced by an unspoken right to buy sex in Ireland. Violence against sex workers has been normalised in Irish society, as if it comes with the territory, and this is something that needs to be considered.

There is no one answer for stopping the sexual exploitation of migrant women. In combating trafficking many difficulties have stem from the fact that government and NGOs do not have shared agendas. As anarcho-feminists, we can learn from this through challenging each other to truly see past our moralistic upbringings, and start forming our agendas based on global equality. There is an immediate need to stand up for those who don't legally 'belong' to our communities and demand that they not be held accountable for the exploitation they have endured. Incorporating the needs of sex workers and trafficked women into political movements, and beginning advocating for migrant rights is hugely important. But trying to unionise migrant sex workers or trying to make them more publicly visible is more likely to get them imprisoned or deported than it is to get them better working conditions and more rights. Don't just sit around waiting for the eventual collapse of all borders, try to hear the needs of those affected by sex trafficking, and assist where you can!

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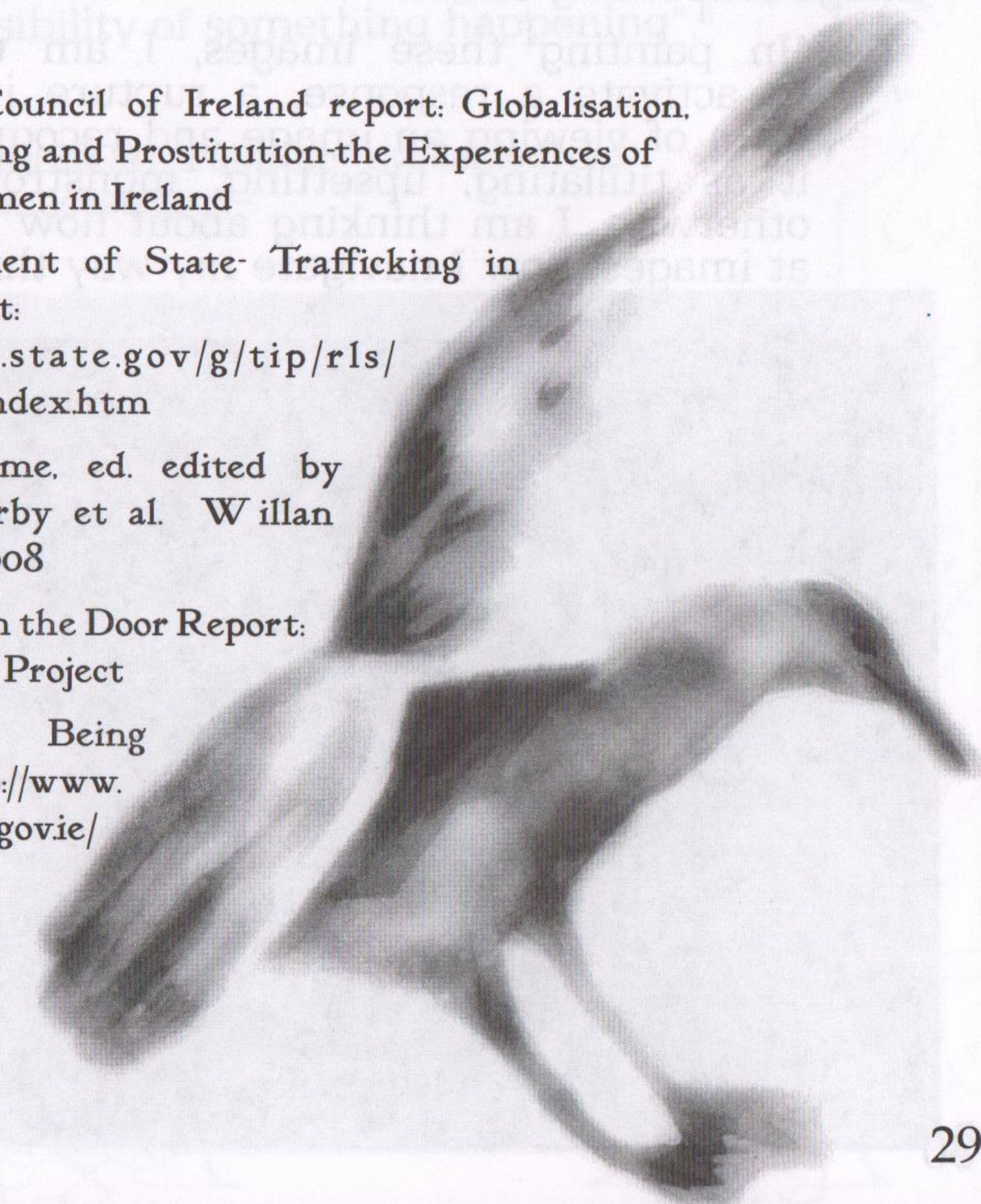
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Aine Macken, Artist

words by Emily
artwork by Aine

Aine Macken is an Irish feminist painter who's most recent work is inspired by our reactions to and interactions with visually drenched Western culture, especially in an online capacity. Previously concentrating on self-portraiture (large nude self-portraits) and having experimented with the boundaries between art and pornography, her latest exhibition takes a more severe turn. Here Macken plays with the ethical challenges of passively consuming visual imagery and teases out an awareness of the longstanding and controversial connection between terror and pleasure in images that populate our environment. Her art is very human; the subject matter is bodily and sometimes crude, but Macken paints in a way which has led one or two critics to describe her style as 'girly'. Her new body of work reduces vast and immense emotional moments to painted squares, units of online video stills in loose watercolour, the facial expressions of a person masturbating to orgasm, or someone experiencing extreme grief on a small white tile. Each image is ambiguous: the terror or pleasure is uncertain, and spectators of these reduced moments experience an instance of ill ease, a critical spark set off by the dubious image, a question regarding the lack of image-consuming ethics:

"In painting these images, I am trying to activate a response, a rupture in the form of viewing an image and recognising it as titillating, upsetting, monstrous or otherwise. I am thinking about how I look at images, how I navigate my way through



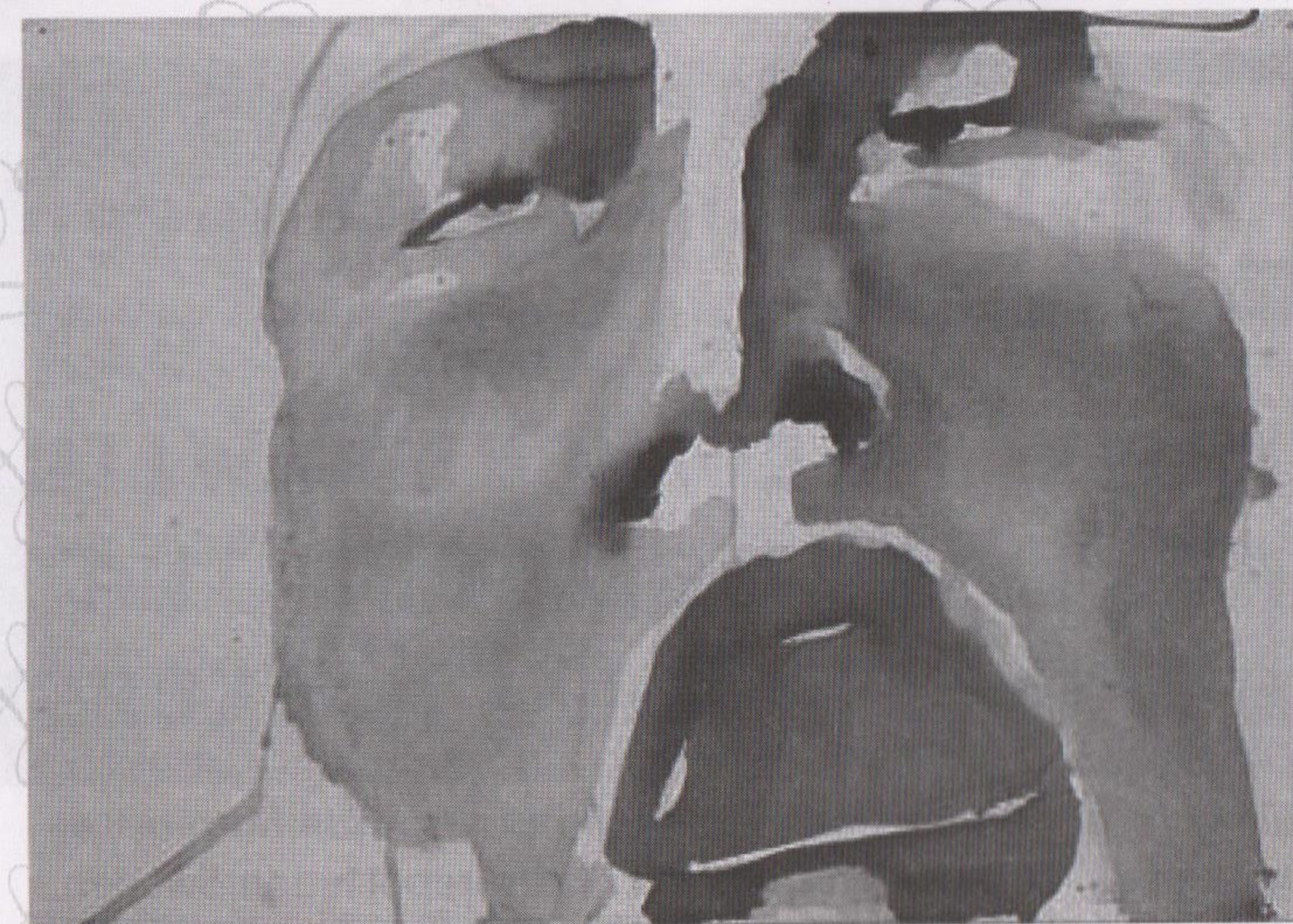
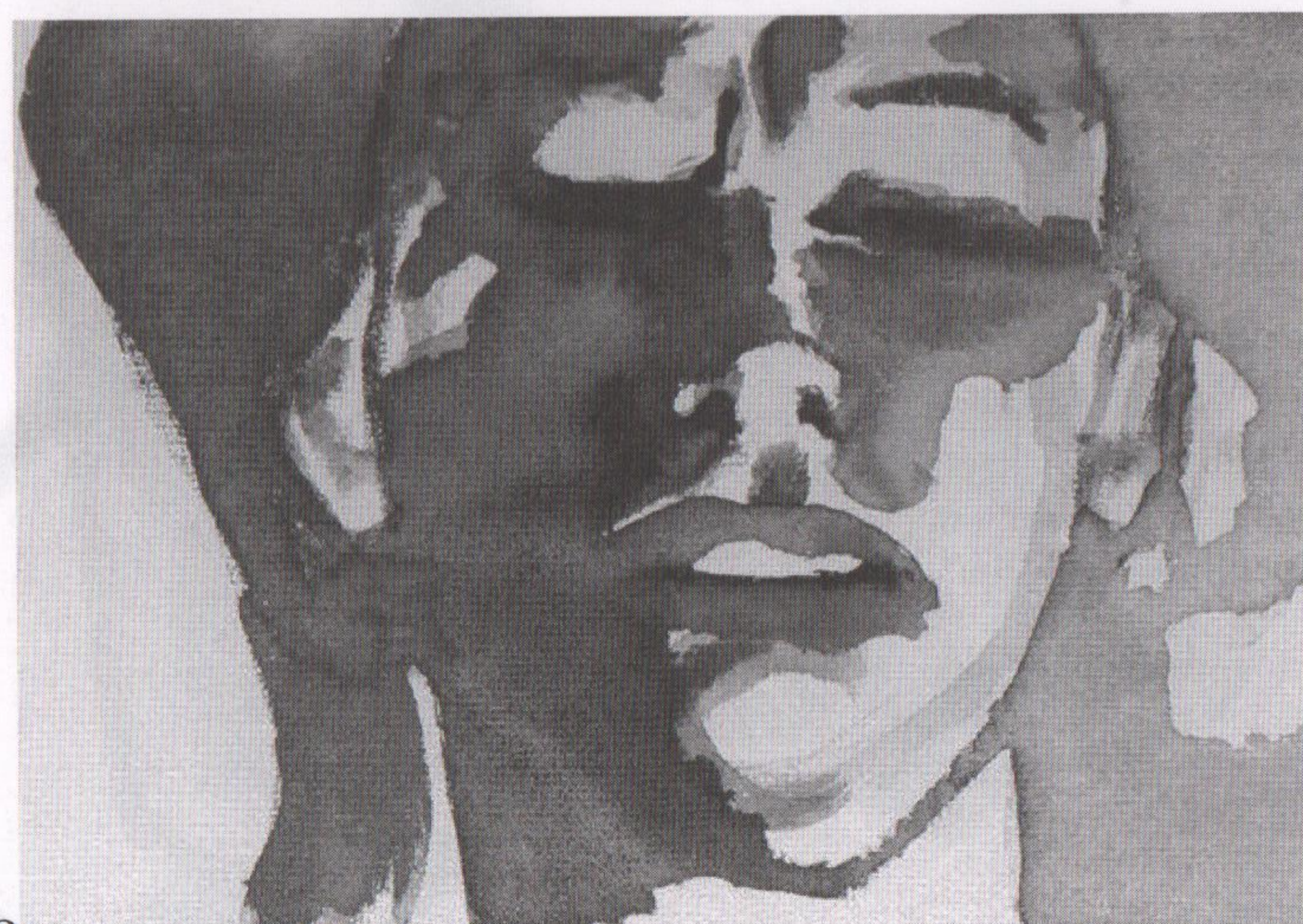
the day... aimlessly trawling through different screens on my laptop. I am growing up a bit too. I remain spiced with elements of the narcissistic of course, but I believe that gratifying oneself continually can only become tiresome. An element of conscience has elapsed itself into my work where I find myself continuously questioning what is that I can do as a painter, and whether the

exercise of painting is merely in itself, an act of self gratification".¹

Macken took images from online porn websites such as beautifulagony.com, an artistically inspired project featuring masturbators shot from the shoulders up. In their new water-coloured form, the faces became blurry expressions of what could be pleasure or pain. Macken began dotting the works with faces of politicians and celebrities to create further uncertainty, a purposeful attempt to increase a sense of confusion within the viewer, but at the same time, perhaps, subconsciously illustrating how images of horror and sex go hand in hand with celebrity and politics in popular culture.

On her website (<http://www.ainemacken.com>), Macken has written three essays entitled 'Screwtube', 'Painting' and 'Horror' which discuss both the inspiration behind her work and the practical application of her skill in negotiating the elusive relationship between horror and sex. But sex and sexuality are preoccupations that appear in all of Macken's work in various manifestations:

"Sexuality has always been pretty central to my work. I am intrigued by perversions and arousals and always have been. I find that there is a certain electricity to the act of looking at an image that can induce arousal. I also enjoy elements of the forbidden, public versions of privacy and how they can be related back to sex. There is something about the orgasm that is so crucial to a break from a monotonous existence. It instigates feelings of love, it brings about life, it can kill you, produces intimacy, it can relieve loneliness, boredom, test your capacities for pain to seek out pleasure, and only lasts a moment. For me, it is one of the only methods of physical play for an adult who is not too keen on football... There is also an element of indulgence to it though that I seem to relate to the pleasurable activity of creating a painting."



The outcome of this particular combination of thought and application can be seen in Macken's finished work; her paintings have an overtly sensual style. Delicate, almost vague watercolour lines and shapes only suggest a face or a figure. On one hand, this effect is an appropriate depiction of the passing moment – it is ungraspable. On the other hand, these washy qualities may have contributed to Macken's work being referred to as 'girly'. Although such comments may have been meant critically, Macken doesn't think girlyness is necessarily a bad thing:

"I find girlyness intriguing. I find it to be a performance certainly, and

this has led to the series of portraits of ladyboys that I have done in the past, as having viewed them at various cabarets throughout my travels it became clear that they were far more feminine than I could ever be. Saying that my work is girly I find curious, as my current work deals with horror, death, depravity, torture, masochism, vanity and joy. I hardly think that these can be deemed solely girly subject matters. The fact that a large portion of my work makes use of a female subject matter is deliberate, but not necessarily abrasive or aggressive/nonchalant towards a masculine viewer. I am a feminist. I expect every man to be a feminist too. To gender an artwork is to attempt to decipher it, and certainly some of my images play up and make use of this genderisation in order to question how gender can be defined, yet some of my more recent work is a lot darker, with a lot more violence attached both to the subject matter, and the application of the paint itself."

Just as she draws on the connections between her subject matter and the actual process of applying paint to canvas or tile, Macken also aligns painting with indulgence, narcissism and vanity. Personally speaking, this is one of the most interesting concepts to have emerged from discussions with Aine about her work; that narcissism can be empowering and that this new take on narcissism involves the need for a new ethical mode regarding our consumption of imagery:

"I think there is a level of guilt attached to the pursuit of narcissism, particularly

in a society such as Ireland which champions the humble. The fact that I am secure and confident in that I am an attractive woman has been an issue for me. I am vain. I believe others are too. Well, I hope they are... Of course I have my insecurities, but I have always found it interesting that I address my appearance in conjunction with my work. I choose to do this. What does that say about me? Not only as an artist, but as a woman? For me I believe that masturbation and seeking to bring oneself to orgasm is an activity of self love, and when placing that within an online forum for people to view, it becomes an activity of narcissism... In relation to ethics, I feel that by combining these with images of the horrific, the unthinkable, the torturous, a short circuit occurs, where instances of emotional physical and ethical issues come into play. For me it is a comment on the consistent barrage of commercial abuses, of focuses on beauty magazines, of the desperate struggle for the body beautiful. These paintings seek out beauty in the unconventional, unstaged moments, a pure visceral insatiable beauty, but also a horrendous frightening voyeuristic consumption of an image."

Macken's latest work brings to bear how powerful our visual experiences can be and how convoluted, experiences that co-exist in both real and virtual realms. Her art

is challenging because it reveals an uncomfortable medley of emotions, pleasure, horror, ecstasy and grief, which our culture attempts to separate but which often co-exist in lived experience:

"Each screaming face is a voice of contemplation upon the horrors and ecstasies which exist from moment to moment, and the vitality of being alive, in terms of existing within a space where the opportunity for both extremes could elapse itself at any moment. These instances of sheer emotion are what inspires this monotonous churn through existence, the possibility of something happening".ⁱⁱ

Endnotes

^{i & ii} Macken (2009) "Painting" available from www.ainemacken.com



SEX WORK GETTING REAL

Ariel: To start, tell me which sex workers you have the most experience supporting...

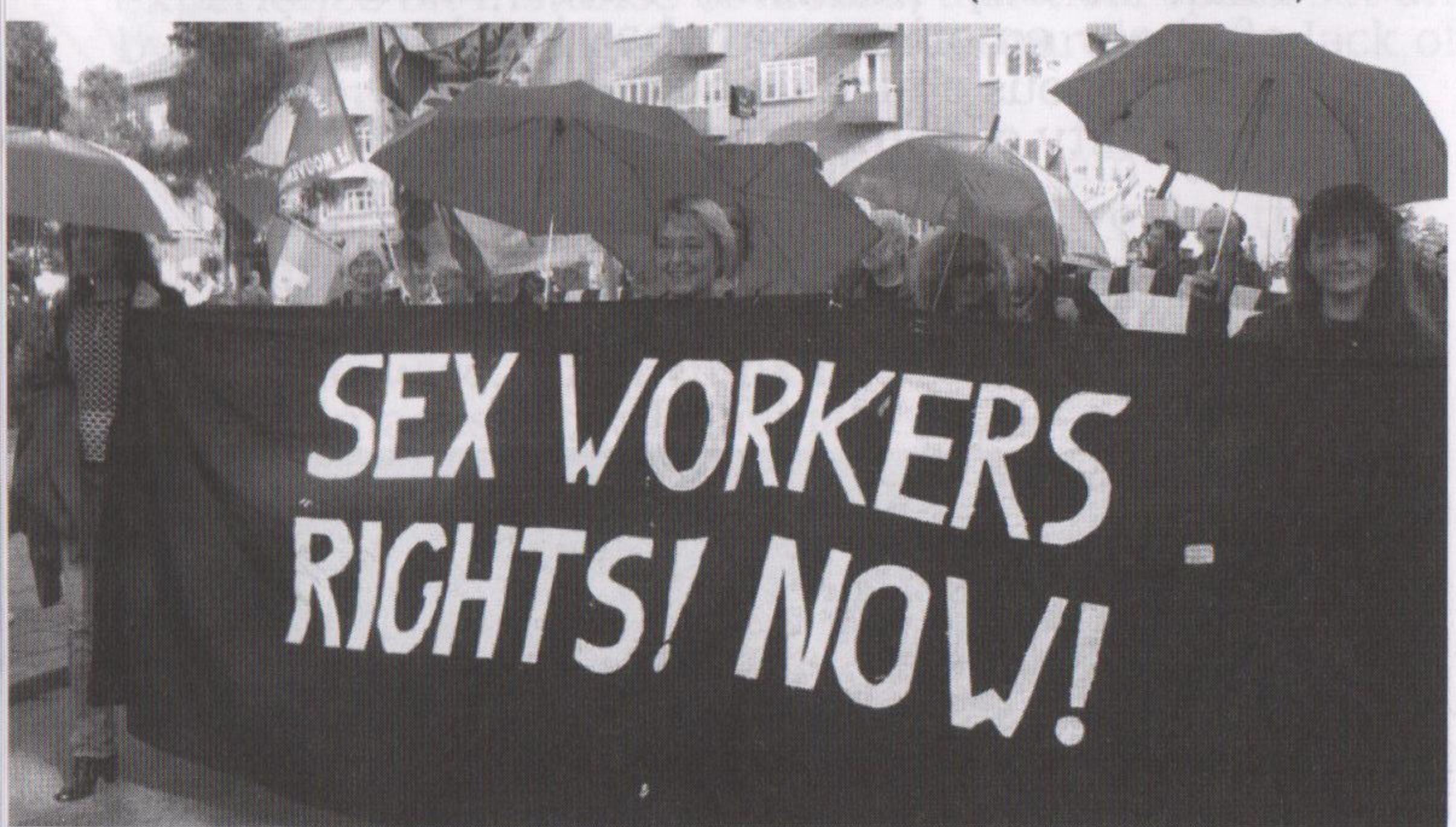
Nine: My experience is all about prostitution. There are other parts of the sex industry I don't feel qualified to talk about and I'm not going to. What I'm talking about here is street based sex work, sex work in flats and saunas, and escorting.

Ariel: What are the misconceptions that people generally have about sex work?

Nine: It begins when people take one sector of the sex industry and presume it represents the whole lot of it. That's it's all about drugs and pimping, that all migrant sex workers are trafficked, or the idea that sex work is 100% violence against women. However, each person's experience varies greatly. It would also be a misconception to say that sex work is all glamorous but I've never heard anyone say anything of the sort. People sometimes say "it's a far cry from Pretty Woman". I bloody know that, everyone fucking knows that. That's a pitfall because, in this limited view, if you're not seeing it as 100% negative and want a more measured debate, then you're presented as thinking it's marvelous. Actually, it's much more complicated than that.

A: There's talk all over Europe about the 'Swedish model' of criminalising clients. I understand it's being touted a lot in the UK. Can you tell me what the Swedish model is, and explain what it means realistically?

N: The Swedish model is based on the perspective that sex work is violence against women. Sex workers are seen as victims and are not criminalised, but rather the clients are. In the UK it's different as they're seizing on the idea of criminalising the clients, with the aim being to reduce demand. But there's no talk about decriminalising the sex workers, they only want to stick to the other half of the model. It's a problem either way. When clients are criminalised the consequences for sex workers who remain in the industry are very negative. Ever since clients using vehicles were criminalised in Scotland (clients indoors, which



is 90% of the industry here, are currently not criminalised), things have gone pretty downhill in the streets. More law-abiding clients get scared and vanish. But criminalising clients doesn't take away anyone's need to make money, or clear out anyone's drug habit overnight, so they're still going to go out to work. Before, women came out on the streets, did a couple of punters, went home at midnight having made their money. Now you're talking about waiting until five in the morning in dodgier, more isolated areas, where the clients are more

ARIEL SPEAKS TO NINE, WHO WORKED FOR OVER SIX YEARS IN EDINBURGH WITH AN ORGANISATION THAT SUPPORTED SEX WORKERS

willing to go. Punters need to avoid police attention just as the sex worker does. This has also been reported in Sweden, where workers have to go with clients they'd have normally turned down, whom they considered perverted, disrespectful or violent. They have to offer services they wouldn't normally. These consequences are not considered by people who are pushing for the Swedish model.

A: Many say that this model would be coupled with trying to get women away from prostitution and into more 'legitimate' professions. What's your take on that?

N: The thing is that you do have sex workers who don't want to be doing it and they should have access to support to help them leave the industry. If it's the only support you're offering though, it doesn't help that much. You need a harm reduction approach for those who continue working. A worker who wants to leave the industry still needs to go out tonight and make her money. It's a long process and there are a lot of issues that need to be sorted out. She needs to be safe while she's still working. It's a real shame that she's doing something she doesn't wanna do, but wringing your hands about it isn't really gonna get us anywhere.

A: Processes like that are always gruelling. Stuff like social welfare, dealing with the medical system, these things are difficult for everyone, moreso for people in vulnerable situations. But what kind of support do sex workers need in general?

N: For starters, some basic things, like handing out condoms or safer sex supplies. You need accessible clinics, open at convenient times, where you can go for a checkup anonymously. If you're not a legal immigrant, you want to feel like you can access these without getting into trouble. And a lot of sex workers work at night, so giving them an appointment at 9AM isn't gonna help! Same goes for support projects, they need to have services people can actually access. There's also exchange of information about violent or dodgy clients of whatever sort. This is really very important. You need to enable networks for peer support and agencies that can circulate this kind of information. When you drive the industry underground, it's harder for that to happen. Good relations with the police are useful, as you don't want them to come in and disrupt things and leave everyone working in isolation. It's better that they have someone accessible, who people can talk to in order to report crimes against them without fearing repercussions. Of course, there need to be support services to leave the industry if they want to. I want to stress again that if that's all you're offering, though, then what's the point?

A: It should be coupled with a comprehensive approach that helps now and in the future.

N: Yeah, not dictating to people what they should and shouldn't be doing. Even in vulnerable circumstances, you are

gonna meet people who say they want to keep doing this and you're not going to stop them. You have to deal with that.

A: What we see in the media seems to be that sex work = wrong = prostituted, possibly trafficked women under a pimp.

N: That's largely not the reality in Edinburgh. Discussions in the media tend to be about street based sex work. It's the most visible thing here in Edinburgh, and I wouldn't expect it to be massively different in other parts of the UK. In other countries it can be a whole different scenario. In Edinburgh, however, you're talking about 10% of the industry. It's nonsensical to represent that as being the entire thing.

A: What I feel is that what matters a lot is not what really happens as much as what is visible. Politicians or policy makers react to the whole "we don't want to see that in our streets" moral panic. The view on sex work seems to be based a lot on this, from left and right. Instead of engaging with it on a rational, factual level, it's dealt with in a political manner. What do you think?

N: You get this even from well-meaning people who say we should legalise brothels so we'll have less people working on the streets. It's well meaning and nice of them, but indoor work is a different issue. Even legalising brothels, you're gonna have women working in the street, as there are many reasons for people to do that. If someone has a drug habit, the manager of a brothel will not want her there. On the other hand, some women prefer not to have to give money to a receptionist or manager. All the money they make is their own, they keep the right to turn down any client they want for any reason. You should have that right indoors but it depends on where you work.

A: Talking about indoor work, I remember there was a bit in the news recently about a brothel manager who got arrested.

N: That's right, in Wales. She discovered a woman working there was trafficked, took her to the police for help which presumably was given. But after that, the manager got done by the police and was bankrupted. That was it for her. Other people in that situation are not going to want to take that risk to help a trafficked woman.

A: There are all these different situations that aren't talked about. Like safety and why some people work indoors and some don't.

N: Most people will choose to work indoors if they have the opportunity, because it's seen as safer. Of course it's not 100% safe but what is? There's also escorting: that can be done independently or through an agency. Interestingly, the internet is being used more and more. Anyone can put up a profile on a website. In the US they use stuff like Craigslist. There's a couple of similar things here, as well as adult sites where anyone can set up a profile and get on with it. What really interests me about this is that since anyone can do it,

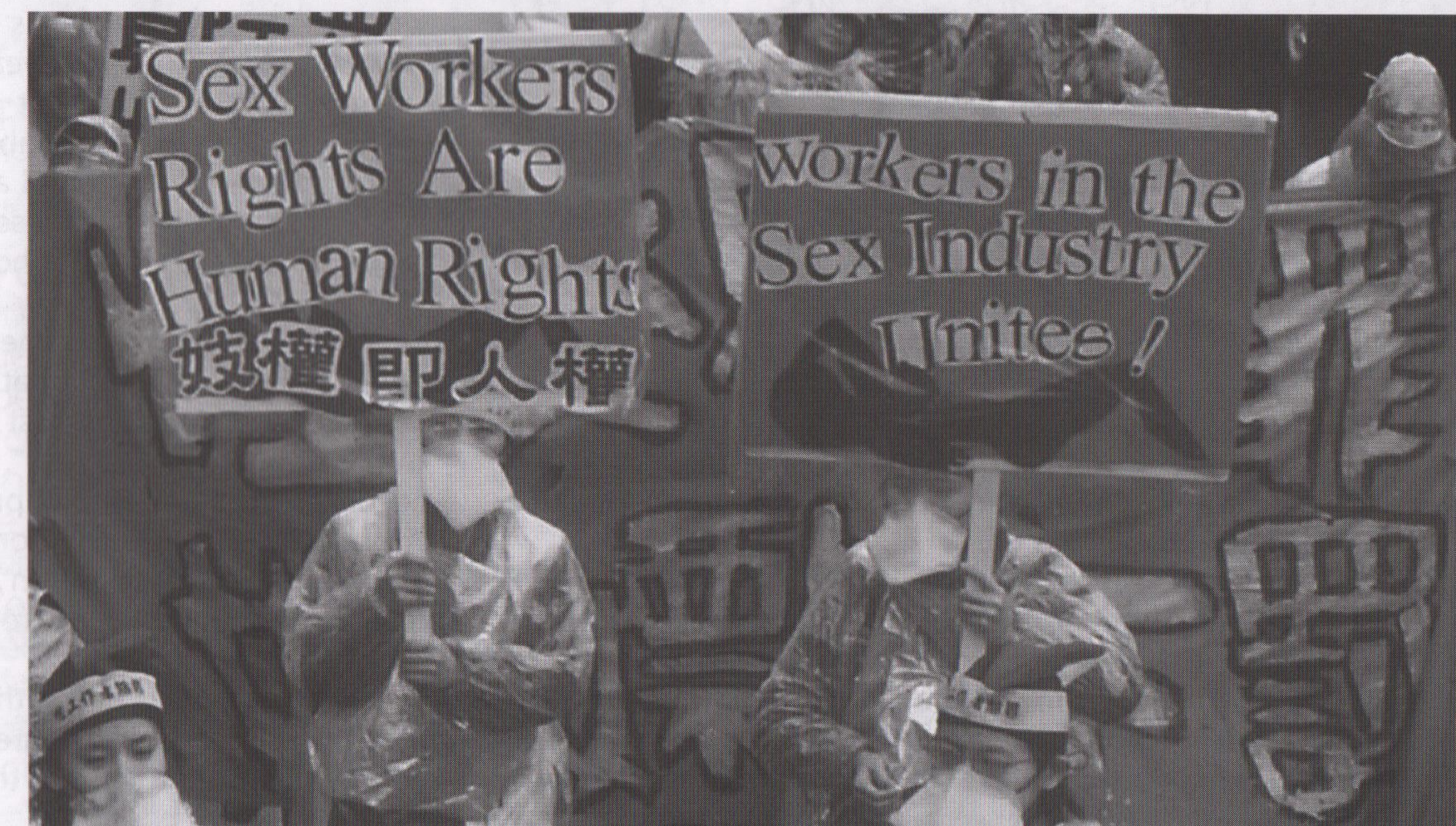
people go into it without necessarily knowing anybody else that does it. I'm concerned about that because of the lack of access to peer support for safety, support services and such. Some of the profiles I've seen show me very clearly that some people are pretty clueless about what they're doing.

A: The issue of exploitation is talked about a lot. How does that relate to the facts on the ground?

N: There are different opinions on what is exploitation. Some people would say prostitution is 100% exploitative.

A: Even if it's a woman on her own?

N: Yes, and I disagree with that. I see it as exploitation when you don't have control over what you're doing, it's not your choice, or you're being controlled by somebody. Or you're expected to provide services for a pittance.



Sex workers rights demonstration, Taiwan, 2004.

A: This seems a dominant issue when arguments come from the feminist camp. Can you tell me more about the debates in feminism regarding sex work?

N: I struggle with that a lot, as I've always identified strongly with feminism. There is a war going on between feminists when it comes to sex work. It feels kinda hopeless, like I don't want to engage with these people anymore. I've tried. Not everyone is hostile and aggressive; people reach out and try to talk about it. But much of the time I feel it's pointless. I'd rather devote my energies to people who're interested in helping, and I don't see help coming from feminism.

A: We haven't banded about the 'A' word yet. Abolitionists.

N: Or prohibitionists, as I'm trying to get used to saying. I think 'abolitionist' sounds quite positive and I don't think they are. The sex workers rights side gets misrepresented a lot by prohibitionists. They claim we're about saying all sex work is fantastic. That'd be very naive. We recognise that some people have positive experiences of sex work, but we don't suggest that that's the case for everyone.

I have to say that I've never been a sex worker so I do feel hesitant

to speak. I'd rather let sex workers do the talking. However, when sex workers do come forward and talk, abolitionists say they are not representative because they are an escort/not on the street/not on drugs/made the choice. Even though the sex industry is seen as this monolithic terrible thing, workers who don't follow that narrative, and speak out, are told "we're not talking about you so you shouldn't be speaking". The prohibitionists contradict themselves: according to them, all sex is terrible, but they're not interested in hearing people who haven't had that experience, yet they realize they do exist. It's the pitfall of oversimplifying the issue. And the thing is, it's hard for a sex worker in general to come out to anyone. Most people are not prepared to do it, with good reasons such as safety, the law, etcetera. It's hard to get sex workers heard.

A: When people want to listen, it seems to be sensationalised. That's what the public seems to want.

N: The publishers don't even have the opportunity to get anything else out, though. It's either the harrowing terrible stories or the glamorous sexy ones. Obviously that's very imbalanced, there's nothing in the middle. Most people I've worked with fall somewhere in the middle of that spectrum. There are good experiences and bad experiences.

A: There seem to be a lot of people favouring abolishing sex work on the academic side.

N: Absolutely, although there are a great deal of academics doing a lot of great stuff around sex work. Their voices don't get heard so much on the media, as it's so much easier to interview an abolitionist who gives you horror stories and a nice soundbite. Journalists don't seem interested in interviewing someone who writes dense academic stuff, which is really brilliant. But it's complex and doesn't grab headlines.

A: It looks like it all gets coloured by the basis that sex work is terrible and a great moral evil. There's this gut emotional response to it. Some academics seem to fall into this.

N: When I was doing my gender studies degree, I was in the Gender & Justice course in the law faculty. There was a discussion on prostitution one day. Someone across the room said something like, 'prostitutes were abused as children and are all drug addicts'. And I was like, 'argh!'. So I responded that I'd taken time to read stuff by sex workers, and there's different experiences so you can't say that about everyone. The teacher said: "that's a really good point, but when you've studied it as I have, and you've seen someone give a blowjob in an alleyway for a fiver, that's disgusting". Then she moved the conversation right on. I was like yeah, a blowjob for a fiver, that's not good! But it has nothing to do with what I just said!

A: There are these pitfalls when talking about it, not being listened to, appealing to emotions...

N: Let me put it this way: I feel more listened to by anyone who doesn't identify as a feminist than someone who does. I should qualify that a bit, but nowadays when I meet another feminist, instead of being 'yeah! another feminist like me!' I just think 'wait until we get to this subject and then we'll see'. Sometimes I want to counter the arguments that present sex

work as wholly negative and disempowering. I give examples of people who have found it a positive experience, been empowered, all that good stuff. That's a problem in itself, and it shouldn't be. Because I'm not saying that it's the same for everyone, that it's all superb. But it gets interpreted as that, and it's something I need to be aware of.

A: This aggressive way of arguing makes you feel like you're put in the defensive.

N: If their mind is made, what's the point? When sex workers want to write or talk about negative experiences, like a bad client, the danger is that it will be picked up by abolitionists and they'll run with it. "There see, the industry is always exploitative. This woman says she's happy being a sex worker but look at what she says there!" But whatever job you've got you're gonna get this even if you like it. I've heard it a lot. A friend of mine who is a sex worker was giving a talk last year to feminists. She was talking about how she got into the industry, and about what she does for safety: a friend always knows where she's going, all these safety precautions. She's talking about how she's empowered, does it the best way she can and looks after herself. Then someone in the audience said that "the fact that you have to take these safety precautions just goes to show it's a violent, dangerous industry". Anyone who's a lone worker needs to take some kind of precaution, have a security system in place. If you're walking home at night, and your friend says 'phone me when you get in', that's quite common. It's not a case for abolishing the entire sex industry.

A: There are aspects of this then that have this dogmatic view, which doesn't feel very progressive, because the point of being progressive is that you get the old morality and put it under a microscope.

N: There's also the assumption that everyone wants to leave the industry. But each woman's circumstances can change. Feminists try to be most concerned with those who don't want to be there, and that's fair enough! But don't put them in more danger by criminalising their clients and driving them further underground. This kind of thinking needs to be examined. It's absolutely not pragmatic.

A: Even within the prohibitionists' model.

N: Yes. If they want to keep those women safe, that's not the way of doing it. I see attacks rising because women are driven into more danger under this system and I wonder how these people can live with themselves. It's the attacker who is at fault, but if you've contributed by lobbying for laws that have driven women to more danger, I don't know if I could live with that. Yet, it's very easy for them to go "well you see? It's an entirely dangerous industry!"

A: Any final thoughts on sex work in general?

N: There's no 'representative sex worker'. It's so diverse that it's pointless to try and find anyone like that. At its most basic, it's the exchange of sexual services for money. That's all. It can be violent, exploitative, empowering, or absolutely grand. It really depends on the situation.

"There is a wrong assumption that everyone wants to leave the industry. But each woman's circumstances can change."

WORDS FIRST

WORDS BY JEAN
IMAGES BY EVE AND AUGUST

As in other male-dominated spheres, the mere presence of women in music can be inherently political. Although, in general, much more men are considered talented musicians, women find empowerment through producing, writing, performing and listening to music. This provides sites of resistance and criticism while (re)claiming cultural production as something that need not, indeed should not, be dominated by one gender.

I specifically chose to focus on black artists to show how music can be a political platform in terms of both issues of gender and issues of race. Furthermore, I deliberately concentrated on commercial rap artists. Underground rap scenes are awash with artists who write lyrics characterized by social criticism. Once something becomes commercial we tend to believe that it can no longer be political, but looking at the works of female rap artists we can see that this need not be the case.

Rap and Hip-Hop have been viewed as controversial, coming under some serious criticism for advocating violence and misogyny. But when looking at rap music, we must not let a few bad apples spoil the bunch. Furthermore, rap has never existed in a vacuum outside of society and unaffected by social influences. This means that the socio-historical and cultural contexts in which rap exists and through which it developed are crucial for anyone who wants to learn more about the genre. This should also be crucial to those who criticize rap, but unfortunately it often is not.

In researching this article I came across some very disturbing lyrics in male rap songs. Here are two examples of the kind of lyrics I'm referring to:

HOES ARE LIKE CUM FREAKS, THEY SUCK YOU DRY
THEY DO WHAT YOU SAY, AND DON'T ASK WHY
WHO SAID THAT HOE AINT OLD ENOUGH?
IF SHE COULD BLEED, THEN SHE CAN FELCK
(TOO SHORT, "HOES")

And:

YOU'VE GOT TO PUT THAT BITCH IN HER PLACE,

Female rappers render visible black working-class women, their agency, their complaints, and their sexualities.

EVEN IF IT'S SLAPPING HER IN HER FACE.
YA GOT TO CONTROL YOUR HOE. CAN YOU CONTROL YOUR HOE?

(SNOOP DOGG "CAN YOU CONTROL YO HOE?")

However, I also found some excellent political and social criticism in the lyrics of some artists. For example, De La Soul's song, 'Millie Pulled a Pistol on Santa', is a criticism of sexual abuse in the family and the silence that surrounds it. It also specifically makes a point of demonstrating how people often do not believe the claims made by victims of abuse:

I MEAN, ACTUALLY FINDIN' HIS OWN
DAUGHTER MILLIE APPEALING
AT THE TIME NO ONE KNEW BUT IT
WAS A SHAME
THAT MILLIE BECAME A VICTIM
OF THE TOLCHY-TOLCHY GAME

WHILE SHE SLEPT IN HE CREST
INSIDE HER BEDROOM
AND HE WOULD TOSS AND THEN
WOULD FORCE HER TO GIVE HIM HEAD
ROOM

MILLIE TRIED REAL HARD TO LET THIS HELL
NOT HAPPEN
BUT WHEN SHE'D FUSS, HE WOULD JUST COMMENCE
TO SLAPPIN'
(DE LA SOUL "MILLIE PULLED A PISTOL ON SANTA")

The lyrics of misogynistic artists should not serve to define all rap music, because the themes and subjects rap artists explore encompass a broad spectrum. Sweeping criticisms of rap music for being misogynistic and violent can serve to obscure the importance of female rap artists as well as those artists who focus their energies on social criticism in general.

Rap is part of a wider history of African-American oral traditions, music styles and political movements. Here are some examples of how some artists reflect that history:

Quinn's book, 'Nuthin' but a 'G' thang', highlights the importance of situating rap in its socio-historical context. She points out the appeal of the 'badman' of rap stemming from his rejection of many white-middle-class norms through which black urban youth culture has been both excluded and condemned.



Moreover, Quinn maintains that attempts to censure antiracist and antiestablishment rap lyrics turned the earlier violence against, for example, police, back in on the marginalised themselves. Quinn suggests that taking into account badman historiography and the origins of rap in traditional black expressive culture provides a more fruitful, contextualised analysis. Quinn points to the similarities between rap and the older tradition of 'toasts' and her book helps us see the complexities of the rap genre and makes difficult any sweeping criticisms of it that ignore the significance of its socio-historical and cultural context.

The similarities between blues and rap have been pointed to², especially in relation to female artists and how such issues as relationships are dealt with in their songs. For example, Perry¹¹ compares Ida Cox's song 'One Hour Mama' with BWP's 'Two Minute Brothers'. Cox sings:

I'M A ONE HOUR MAMA SO NO ONE MINUTE DADA
AIN'T THE KIND OF MEN FOR ME

HE'S GOT TO BRING ME REFERENCE
WITH A GREAT LONG PEDIGREE
AND MUST PROVE HE'S GOT ENDURANCE
OR HE DON'T MEAN SNAP TO ME

And BWP rap:

BUT HERE'S THE TYPE OF MAN THAT WE CAN'T STAND
ONE WHO ALWAYS HOLDS HIS THINGS IN HIS HAND
LYIN' AND SAYIN' IT'S ABOUT SIZE NINE
ALWAYS GOT HIS HANDS BETWEEN HIS LEGS
YOU KNOW THE KIND THAT ALWAYS BEGS
THE ONE WHO CLAIMS TO BE A GOOD LOVER
USUALLY HE'S A TWO MINUTE BROTHER

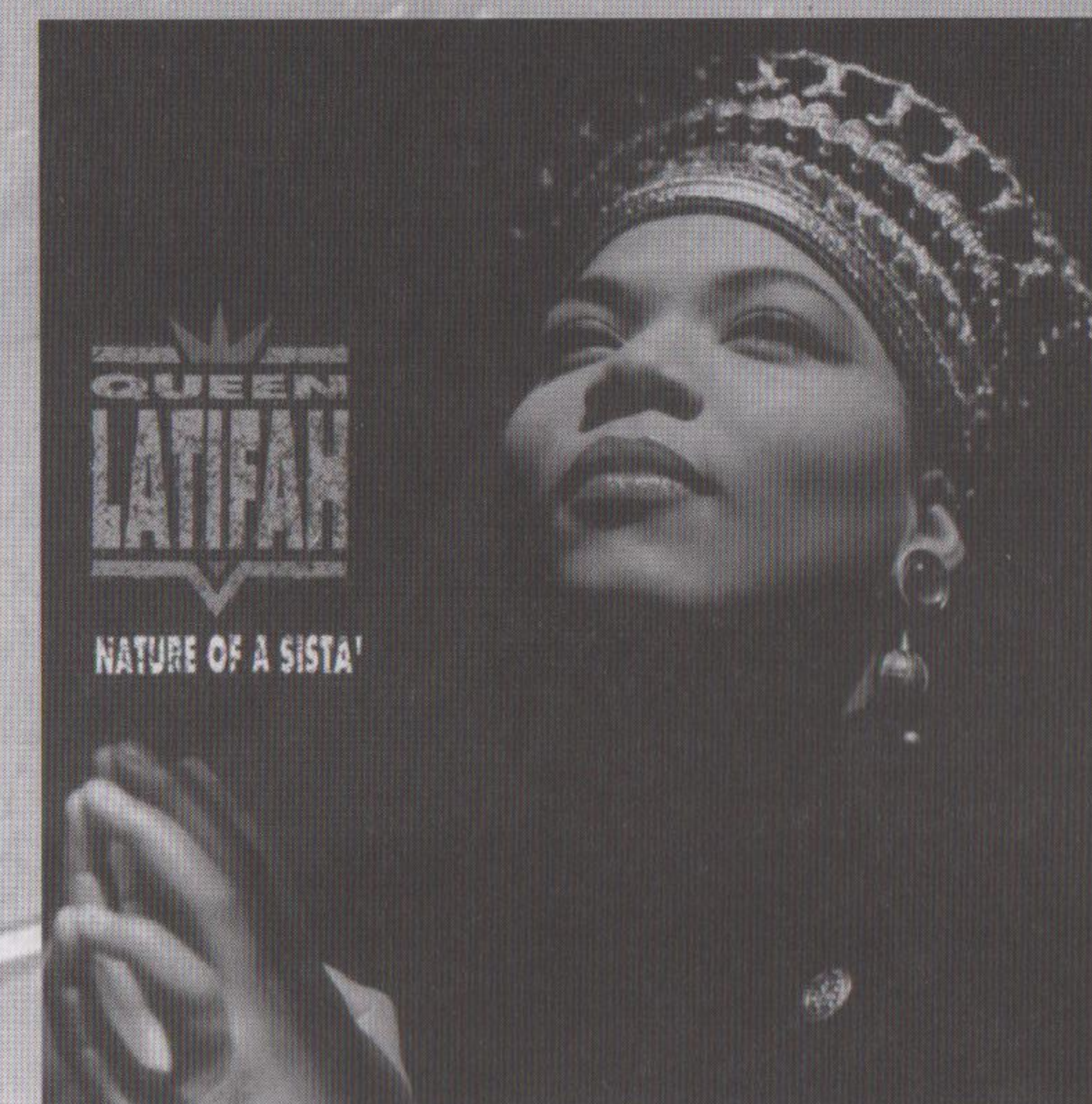
Furthermore, similar criticisms have been made of rap as of other traditionally black music genres such as the blues and Jamaican music. Although criticisms have been made on so-called moral grounds, Sullivan points out that 'Often, antirap sentiments are thinly veiled anti-black comments'³. She also says that from the start, the public viewed hip-hop culture and rap music through a racist lens. Rappers and fans were often portrayed as menacing black adolescents by politicians and the media. And so, Sullivan argues that 'the struggle for rap artists and fans to gain respect has taken place in the context of pervasive, institutionalized White racism'¹¹.

In addition, rap music and hip-hop culture may also be seen as being linked to the Black Power Movement. Rapper Tupac Shakur's mother, Afeni Shakur, was a Black Panther involved in this movement. Pough⁴ suggests that Afeni and Tupac represent the embodiment of the link between hip-hop culture and the Black Power Movement. Like the revolutionary rhetoric and customs the Panthers used to attract the masses, rap may be seen as a vehicle for reaching the people. Rap's origins in anti-racist social criticism further echo the aims of the Black Power Movement. Moreover, Ricardson and Scott⁵ say that rap music was born of inadequate remediation of social inequities and so American society ought to take responsibility for its role in the production of rap music rather than just condemning it along with black urban youth culture. Rappers themselves have often been critical of the American government, the authorities, social institutions, etc. for not only failing to remedy the ills of, for example, the ghetto, but for taking part in the construction of the very ills that plague certain disadvantaged areas in America. This can be seen, for example, in Ice Cube's song 'Why We Thugs':

THEY GIVE US GUNS AND DRUGS
THEN WONDER WHY IN THE FLICK WE THUGS
CALL ME AN ANIMAL UP IN THE SYSTEM
BUT WHO'S THE ANIMAL THAT BUILT THIS PRISON
WHO'S THE ANIMAL THAT INVENTED LOWER LIVING
(ICE CUBE "WHY WE THUGS")

Within Hip-hop circles, many critics claim that the corporate takeover of rap and attempts to reach a 'wider and whiter' audience have drawn the genre away from its roots in anti-racist social criticism. The negative aspects of some of the most commercial rap are thus validated by audiences. In other words, audience demand has helped to validate the violent misogyny and objectification of women found in many of these lyrics and videos. The success of sexist rap points to prevailing sexist and misogynistic ideas in society as a whole.

A very significant role of black female rappers is their creation of a space for black women in popular culture, thus realising the political potential of rap music. The exclusion of black women (and women in general) from cultural production and public life throughout history is recognised by many today⁶. What female rappers attempt, successfully, is to render visible black working-class women, their agency, their complaints, and their sexualities.



Some female artists such as Salt-N-Pepa and TLC, and more recently Missy Eliot, have made specific attempts to put black female sexuality on the radar and to promote a positive view of the black body which allows for a rejection of the hierarchy of what may be deemed beautiful. Female rappers exude a 'distinctly black, physical and sexual pride' that rejects the beauty standards in American culture that marginalise black women⁷.

In their song 'Ain't 2 proud 2 beg', T.L.C. deal with female sexuality and desire. The group show that there is no shame in female desire or in claiming your sexuality as your own:

CAUSE I AIN'T 2 PROUD 2 BEG
4 SOMETHING THAT I CALL MY OWN
AND I WANT 2 BE TOUCHED
AND FEELING SO MUCH BECAUSE
EVERYBODY NEEDS SOME GOOD LOVIN'

And:

YEAH I LIKE IT WHEN YOU (KISS)
BOTH SETS OF LIPS
(TLC "AIN'T 2 PROUD 2 BEG")

A further example of the reclaiming of female sexuality comes from Salt N' Pepa's song 'Shake Your Thang' in which the women are arrested for lewd dancing. The lyrics encourage women to take control of their bodies and use them as they please for sexual expression and not necessarily sexual invitation. The importance of their arrest in the video is that it exposes the 'informal yet institutionally-based policing of female sexual expression'¹¹. 'Shake Your Thang' gives confidence to female audiences and supports women to feel good in their bodies and in their ways of expressing their sexuality for themselves.

These women clearly seek to claim public space as they use their voices to call attention to marginalized groups. Furthermore, black women's silence throughout history makes the presence of female rappers in popular culture even more politically significant. As Rose argues, the resistant elements of female raps are 'better understood when we take the historical silence and sexual objectification of black women into consideration'⁷. One song that seeks to fill some of this silence is Queen Latifah's 'Ladies First'. The

video features images of numerous black female activists from over the years. The lyrics and the video for 'Ladies First' recognises the importance of black female political activists and offers hope for the development of a pro-female, pro-black political consciousness¹¹.

Female rappers, like their male counterparts, have also dealt with social issues such as racism, police violence and drug abuse, as in MC Lyte's song 'Eyes are the Soul':

WISHIN HE WOULD'VE USED HIS MIND AND NOT RUSHED
TO PUSH IN THE BUSH BUT TOOK HIS TIME
TO GET TO KNOW THE GIRL HE SLAPPED SKINS WITH
SHARED NEEDLES WITH
WISH HE COULD GO BACK, CHANGE THE DIRECTION
BUT NOW HE'S GOT THE INFECTION
(MC LYTE "EYES ARE THE SOUL")

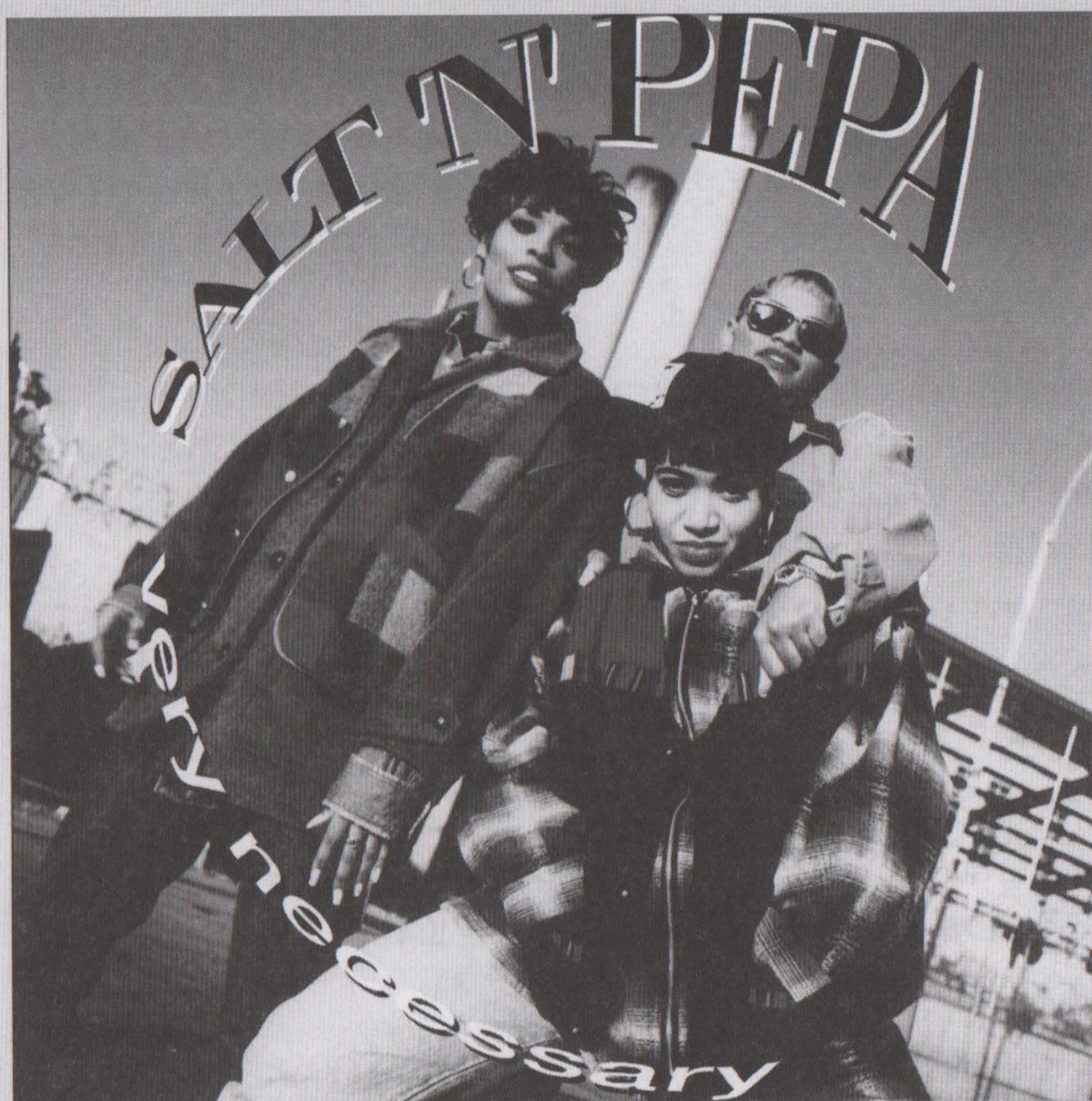
There are also lesbian rappers whose lyrics and presence in hip-hop culture are extremely politically important. Keyes⁸ points out that black lesbians are at times forced to live and struggle against white male patriarchal culture on the one side and white lesbian culture, racism, and general homophobia on the other¹¹. Rapper Queen Pen, for example, has complained of how it's easier for openly lesbian white women performers such as Ellen DeGeneres and k.d. lang to be accepted. She asks the question 'Why shouldn't urban lesbians go to a girl club and hear their own thing?'¹¹. God-Des & She touch on topics such as the visibility of lesbians and gays, political criticism including the subordination of women in the US, and mocking the hip-hop scene⁹. Here's an example of some lyrics from this lesbian duo:

FUCK YOUR IMAGES, FUCK THIS HAIR, FUCK THIS
INDUSTRY CLIZ I DON'T CARE
WHAT THEY THINK THAT WE NEED TO BE, I'M GOD-
DES, MAN AND THIS IS SHE.
WE WRITE WHAT WE LIKE, WE WRITE WHAT WE FEEL,



**FLY
GIRLS!**
B-BOYS
BEWARE:
REVENGE
OF THE
SUPER
FEMALE
RAPPERS!

SOUL JAZZ RECORDS SJR CORP
1 DEPENDABLE STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10011



WE WRITE ABOUT THE TRUTH,
WE KEEP IT REAL NO GLAMOUR BLINKS, FLICK THE
BULLSHIT.
MY MUSIC IS EXPLOSIVE, TOTALLY STRAIGHT.
WHY YOU BRAGGING ABOUT WHAT YOU HAVE.
I TALK ABOUT THE THINGS THAT MAKE ME MAD.
I GUESS I'M A BITCH THAT EVERYBODY FEARS BUT
IT'S TIME THAT I MAKE SOMETHING CLEAR.
THAT I NEVER GONNA SHOW MY TITS FOR YOU
AND I NEVER GONNA DO WHAT YOU WANT ME TO.
I NEVER GONNA GIVE THEM WHAT THEY WANT.
I'LL SHOW 'EM WHAT I GOT. I'M MAKING ANOTHER
HIT AND I LET IT DROP. FLICK WHAT THEY WANT.
(GOD-DES)

Some female rap artists have attempted to subvert the negative sexual power dynamics that are represented in some misogynistic rap lyrics. For example, Le Shaun's song 'Gimme Head' contains the following lyrics:

YO I GOT A FLICKIN' PLANE TO CATCH AND BABY I'M
FEELIN KINDA TENSE
SO WHAT'S UP, WON'T YOU LOOSEN ME UP BABY NO
OFFENSE
BUT YOUR DICK DON'T DO THE TRICK
I MEAN THE JOB FOR ME
GET ON YOUR KNEES AND JUST SLOB FOR ME...

Such lyrics have the potential to challenge negative attitudes towards women found in some rap songs by subverting the gendered power roles that those songs attempt to enforce. In other words, such songs by female artists can be seen as 'inverting the traditional male-female roles and taking the "man's place" as aggressor'. Sexual freedom in female rap has been growing, as well as the acceptability of female sexuality and the willingness of female rappers to address issues of their own bodies and sexualities. Furthermore, in TLC's song 'His Story' we find a strong statement regarding sexual assault and other forms of sexual oppression in which the group draws on the historical labelling of black women as hypersexual

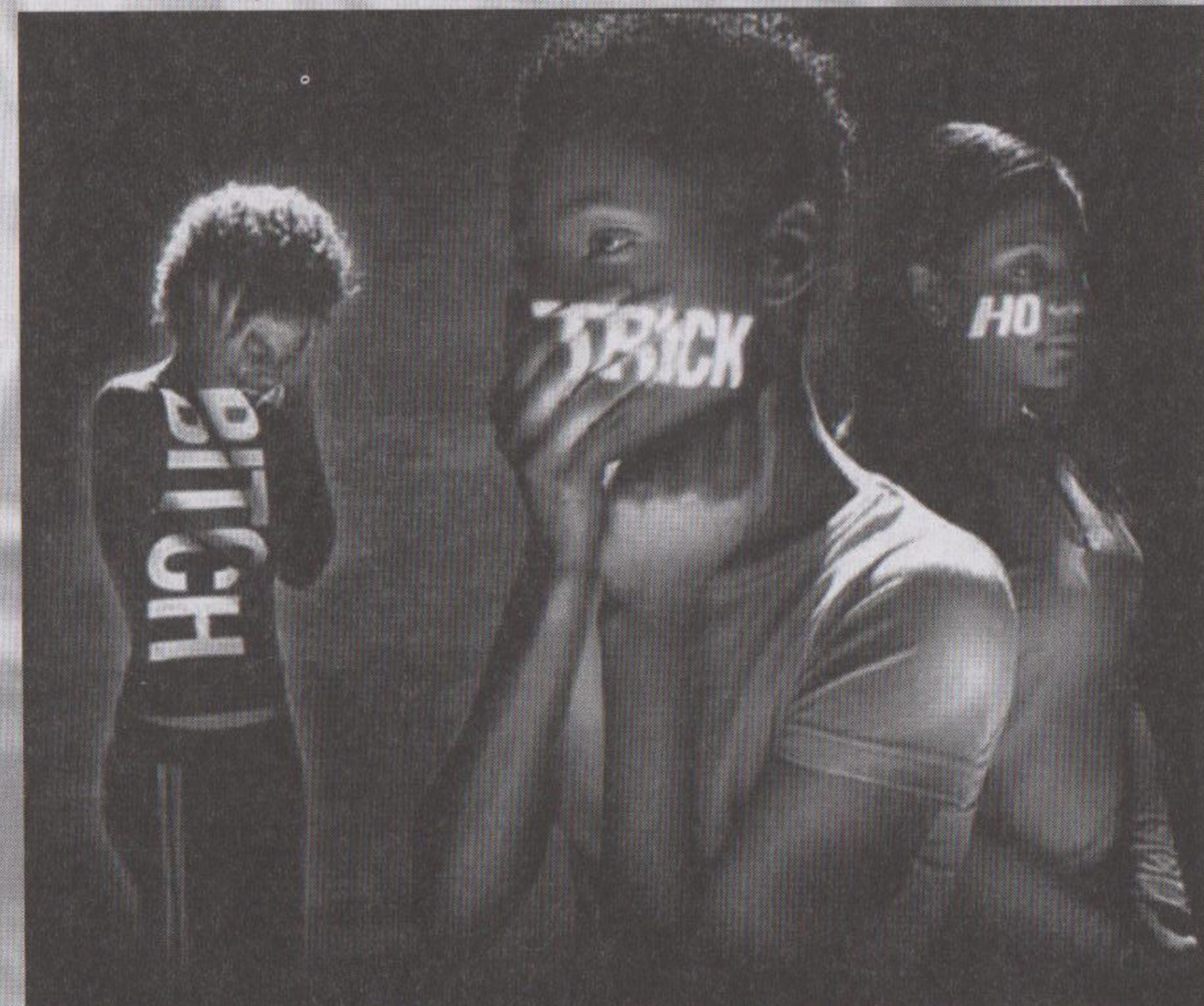
and the use of this stereotype as an excuse for this oppression.

So, if we look at some of the lyrics of black female rappers we can see how their music can be politically important and useful for exploring and criticising current inequities. Female rap artists have not only proven that they have lyrical skills. They have also created spaces from which to deliver powerful messages from black female and black feminist perspectives. Keyes argues that women rappers are achieving major strides in rap music by continuing to chisel away at stereotypes about females as artists in a male-dominated tradition and by (re)defining women's culture and identity from a Black feminist perspective.

True, there are extremely misogynistic male rap artists and their lyrics are not to be taken lightly. However, rap music has important political dimensions which can be seen in, for example, the platform which rap has provided for female artists to voice their criticisms, their complaints, their demands. It has also served as a site of resistance and the reclamation of women's (in particular black women's) role in cultural production: 'Female rappers use their performances as platforms to refute, deconstruct, and reconstruct alternative visions of their identity. With this platform, rap music becomes a vehicle by which Black female rappers seek empowerment, make choices, and create spaces for themselves and other sistas'.

(Endnotes)

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Owning Me, Owning You

by ariel

Those of us in oppressed classes often find that limited rights to our bodies are granted as temporary privileges. These are dependent upon the whim of professionals in the legal or medical fields, mostly white, mostly cis/straight male, and mostly middle class. These institutions dictate our day to day lives, yet are greatly ignorant of life experiences unlike their own. Currently, bodies have become part of the public arena, a process which opens them to abuse from different institutions in society (1). However, with the idea of body sovereignty, of owning ourselves physically, as our banner, it may be possible to build a new movement of the oppressed. We all want and need our bodies back, for our full emancipation as free, mature beings. We need an emancipated sexuality, and a world without supremacists in charge

It seems like common sense that our body belongs to nobody but ourselves. But like many things in our world, there are limits to the freedom we have over ourselves, from corporations being given development contracts on formerly public land, to the state itself and its demarcation of where we can go or not. How we can heal, how we treat our bodies, and what we can do with them, where we can protest and sometimes where we can live, all of these are situations in which people often have little control.

The body is where most of our battles for liberation are fought, as forces permanently push to take ownership of our bodies away from us.

When we begin to analyze oppressions, we can see that mainstream ideas become oppressive by applying binaries. There are "deserving" and "undeserving" bodies. "Deserving" and "undeserving" immigrants. Once the categories are established, binaries get repeated over and over through media, politicians, and every medium considered to be an "authority". It's hard to get out of a mindset which divides everything into two simplistic choices. It influences the way we think by creating exclusive categories instead of simply different aspects of people.

Thus we have categories like male/female, national/non-national, gay/straight, middle-class/working-class, cis/trans. It can, at times, be easy for those categories to get simplified further to mean us/them, good/bad, normal/freak. This makes oppression easier to enact by condemning different parts of the population as undesirable. Furthermore, it not only distorts our view of reality, but it makes it that much harder to fight oppressions and reclaim our bodies.

Bodies that are not white are marked always as being the 'other'. That is to say, they are not 'normal' but 'abnormal', exceptional. In a male, straight, cis, able-dominated world, bodies deviating from this picture are always marked as 'other', which supports oppression. This mark extends to everything, from the language we use to our

access to housing, medicine, knowledge and employment. Yet the freedom to make a life worth living wherever we may need is a human right. Right now, though, it's granted to us as a privilege, an allowance given to some people, considered 'worthy' or 'legal'. For those of us on the 'good' side of the world, with the 'right' passport, migration tends to be a non-issue. That's because we're not part of the 'undesirable' populations. I'm Argentinian, but I'm made "worthy" by mere legal chance since my grandfather was Italian. If that had not been the case, then I wouldn't be a 'worthy' EU migrant. Working to make a living is a requirement in society (and most people don't have the privilege to be able to drop out of that system). Employment is, however, hugely discriminatory, to the point that we're encouraged

to 'sell ourselves' and minimise any marked characteristics. Anyone applying for a job has to present themselves in their best light, showing a mask which may not be true to their real self. When one has a marked characteristic, something to show our 'otherness', it's often necessary to hide it too. I've known people having to disguise names sounding too 'foreign' in order to apply for a job in Ireland. If an out trans person tells a prospective employer that they are trans, and does not hide it, they probably won't get hired. It's not unheard of for companies not to hire women of a certain

BODY STEALIN'

- Where are you or are you not allowed to go?
- Are you always informed clearly about medical procedures you are about to undergo? Are you given choices?
- Does your doctor listen to you? Would they listen to you if you were a white straight cis male?
- Do others ask before they touch you?
- Which important parts of who you are do you have to hide when applying for a job?

age as they believe they'll get pregnant and take maternity leave right away, which is seen as unprofitable. It's even common practice for people to get tattoos where they won't be visible, so as not to impair their chances of getting a job.

Irish society considers people's natural diversity to be unnatural, marked as strange. The origin of this prejudice lies in the complex history of the country, most recently on the much analysed catholic, male-breadwinner morality that permeated Irish society and politics. The Irish Constitution, as well as further legislation, uphold the idea of the heterosexual family, where a woman's place is as a domestic worker. Anything that diverged from this model was considered immoral and, often, illegal. Thus, regarding gender and sexuality, non-normative bodies were marked as strange. Women's bodies are demonised, from the taboos about menstruation and breastfeeding in public, to trans panic about trans women's genitals, to pregnancy. Pregnancy is treated as an illness, with doctors withholding information from pregnant women about their own bodies, treating the entire process like the curing of a condition. Public breastfeeding still remains controversial.

And when one is marked as a sexual deviant, the hammer comes down as well: contraception was illegal only two decades ago, divorces were not available for heterosexual couples, and homosexuality was criminalised.

IRELAND & THE BODY

- The Irish constitution considers women to be free domestic workers.
- The state, through silence, enabled the abuse of children by members of the Catholic clergy and its systematic cover-up.
- Trans people are not allowed to change their gender legally.
- Contraception was only available without prescription after 1992.
- Abortion is in a murky legal state after several challenges to Irish law. Over 7,000 women travel abroad every year to procure an abortion.
- Homosexuality was illegal until 1993.
- Divorce was illegal until 1995.
- Until the 1980s, women who were found to be 'immoral' were sent to Magdalene Laundries for such 'crimes' as having sex before marriage, being victims of abuse and incest, or having a child out of wedlock. Women were committed to those institutions usually for life, in a prison-like situation controlled by nuns and members of the clergy.
- Same-sex marriage is still illegal, and planned legislation to address the issue isn't equal enough.

Same sex marriage still isn't allowed. The blood of queer men isn't good enough for Irish blood banks.

It's not just sex, but gender and identity that are taken from us. Trans people have been struggling to get their identities recognised and voices heard, as well as to access treatments to live fuller lives. It's been a tough battle, however. The medical establishment claims to have a better understanding of our experiences than ourselves, often utilising sexist, binary standards to dictate who is allowed access to treatment and support. The violent, sexist nature of our society is reflected in the way in which the medical establishment decides who is or isn't a 'real' trans person. Doctors have, historically, used our society's simplistic and oppressive ideas of what makes a 'real man' and a 'real woman' to allow trans people to medically transition. These standards were based on stereotypes of hyper femininity and hyper masculinity. Their main aim is to reduce the chance of trans people living openly as such, with a great emphasis on who could 'pass' as their preferred gender, so that trans people could remain hidden from view. This meant that it took years for trans people to be able to find and talk to each other, and be out in the open, a process that is still taking place. When we came to the light, however, we discovered that the trans body, even after a sanctioned transition, is treated as a strange, artificial construct, an affectation produced by a deluded minority. Fellow feminists and activists, who should be allies in this struggle to claim our bodies, also fall into the trap of calling trans people fakes or not recognising our identities. This blatantly ignores the silenced history of transgender individuals, a history which goes back far before the beginnings of modern medicine.

In all of our struggles, we have to see that our very bodies are at stake. We live in cultures that dictate our existence to the very core of our beings: our physical bodies. For those of us in ethnic minorities, queer, gender non-conforming, and women everywhere, this is a struggle for our lives.

(1): Troost, H, "Reclaiming Touch", collected in Friedman J & Valenti J (2008) Yes means yes! Visions of female sexual power & a world without rape, Seal Press

Sexy Health... Minus the Babies!

words by Sheila
artwork by Eve

We are currently in a minefield. guinea pigs involved in a social experiment. Birth control enables women, and men to an extent, to override nature and choose when and if they will procreate. I herald this as a fantastic development within female and societal progression, however proceed with caution.

The Irish Contraceptive Bill celebrates its 30th birthday this year. In the bill's infancy it was deemed by sceptics as a money swindler. Condoms were only available by prescription, and were therefore costly and requiring a doctors visit. Thirty years on we can now enjoy an array of birth control pills of varying hormones, injections, patches, coils and implants. The sceptics were correct though: doctors and pharmaceutical companies amass huge wealth from our liberation. Modern medicine can be viewed as an agent of social control: in terms of contraception Irish women have very little control.

We are ill educated in our contraceptive choices and birth control maintenance. Fifty-three per cent of unplanned pregnancies occur whilst

on contraceptives. Our sexual health education within the school system remains poor. Whilst abortion is still illegal and rogue crisis pregnancy counselling services still exist, this is an area that needs to be worked upon.

Many women have genuine worries for their long term health, and do not agree with the ecological ramifications of the pharmacological nature of contraception. Also many women are in a socio-economical position unable to afford birth preventatives, as continual GP visits and prescriptions are expensive unless you are on a medical card or earning above minimum wage.

Side effects whilst on hormonal contraceptives are common and are regularly misdiagnosed as medicinal maladies such as IBS, depression, anxiety, varying skin conditions, and vaginal infections, which are the most prominent. Many women are therefore taking unnecessary surplus medication and putting their health at risk.

Not everyone's experience is negative. Many women have many care free sexy years happily on a

contraceptive. But many women do have trouble finding contraceptives that suit them and are unaware of the medical and natural alternatives to hormonal birth control. Due to this lack of knowledge and help from the frontline medical world we are polluting our bodies, are overly dependant upon drugs, decreasing the power that awareness of bodily autonomy brings, and lining the pockets of a corrupt medical system.

I selected this topic because of many conversations with friends about contraceptives and realising there is such a variance of practise amongst doctors, these conversations really do provide a service within themselves.

There are many women who react adversely to hormonal contraceptives. I am one of these numbers and had to make that gruesome discovery myself. I was initially placed on Yasmine. I was a bit weepy on them but I put that down to having a young child. My main concern was that my lifestyle was hectic and I've a tendency to leave bags behind, so I kept missing days on the pill. My periods got really messed up and I did not

want to have another kid, so something had to give. I decided I would try the Mirena coil. All seemed amazing, and five years of carefree sex with no babies - even now it still sounds appealing! The insertion process was fine pain free. I kind of enjoyed it. I got my womb measured: 7cm is the size of my womb, a cm bigger than average. I had a lovely conversation about varying womb sizes with the doctor, and all was good. I experienced no heavy bleeding. I didn't even need to take the recommended paracetamol. As the weeks went on, my moods became more and more erratic, violently so at times. I put this down to stress - I had just moved in with my boyfriend, started back to college, was running round after a two year old, and I presumed myself to be weak and unable to cope.

I went to the doctors. He suggested anti-depressants. I refused. He pushed. I refused. This was a dance that went on between three different doctors. I became increasingly worse, suicidal, manic, begging my boyfriend to place me into a mental hospital, alienating more and more family and friends. I thought I was certifiably insane and never going to return back to my previous perception



of sanity. My boyfriend suggested a short trip away on my own to get my head together, so I did, but only my son stopped me from trying to commit suicide when I was away.

I came back determined to fight the madness as such, only because it was really not fair to my child to live with the mess that I'd become. I have an holistic approach to life and have nothing against anti-depressant medication except that they are prescribed far too easily, and we now have an increasing problem with heart illnesses due to people being placed on prescription drugs unnecessarily. There are more natural ways of combating depression.

I tried everything: changed my diet, moved out of my boyfriends place. The insanity had pushed our relationship over the edge, the whole process had nearly as much of an effect on him as it did me. Even two years on we are still licking our wounds from that awful passage of time.

I cut my hours at college, cut out drinking and smoking, took up exercise, received acupuncture and regular massages. I still didn't feel happy. There was more peace in my life, but I still felt awful. I would play with my son, then when he'd go to bed I'd spend the entire night sobbing and still feel as bad when I woke up the next morning if I managed to get asleep. I don't know if I am overplaying or underplaying how the events unfolded, but it was an awful time for everyone involved. As a last resort I went to see a family planning specialist. I told my symptoms, the mania, the loss of libido, and the aggression. The Mirena was taken out immediately. Within an hour, my head felt different, like someone cleared a space in the fog - an ever so small space and that space grew for 6 months as I returned to being me. The Mirena had stopped me producing oestrogen for seven months. It only happens in 3% of cases. While it is rare,

and I did have an extreme experience, side effects are common. Practises vary and it's women who suffer. I met a friend after I came off the Mirena. She was trying a new pill out after her third child, and had an awful time for 6 weeks, screaming, shouting, wailing. Her doctor laughed and said, "We won't be putting you on the Mirena." It was her doctor's practise to try women out on this pill before putting them on the Mirena. What we wouldn't have given for 6 weeks of lunacy rather than seven months!

I have learnt from the whole experience that contraception is massively important. Ireland is nowhere near progressive enough for co-parenting to be the norm. Women do the majority of the child rearing in this society so until we are ready as individuals for the wonderful road of parenthood and to challenge gender roles on a daily basis, we need something to stop those babies increasing the population.

There are many non-hormonal contraceptives out there but again Ireland has placed us in a difficult position with this. Between the Catholic Church being very odd about contraception for years and the health service really wanting to become privatised nowadays, it makes things a bit trickier and expensive.

The Billings method (also known as the Rhythm method), as heralded by the Catholic Church, is an extremely effective

form of contraception. Developed by an Australian couple Drs John and Evelyn Billings, it is a natural way of observing your fertility cycle alongside the menstruation cycle and can be used in any condition: regular cycles, irregular cycles, breastfeeding, approaching menopause. The Billings method teaches an individual/couple to monitor closely the woman's bodily routine, and is quite a liberating form of contraception, but only when observed properly. Courses need to be undertaken. In Ireland there are two voluntary organisations, NAOMI and ACCORD, running courses on natural methods of contraception with free courses available.

When the Billings method was taught as part of a study in the Calcutta slums, the pregnancy rate was 0. However Billings is not suited to individuals with hectic lifestyles or those wanting something that takes up less time. The Persona method is a good alternative, but there are more abstaining days with this method, and also if you have a cycle that is somewhat irregular it is not the best choice. It works by monitoring the change of level of hormones in your body relating to your menstrual cycle. It is a simple system that involves daily urine tests. The monitor does the rest of the work, letting you know your green days of woohoo go for it and red days when a pregnancy can occur so better put a cap on it. It involves a cost of buying the monitor and urine stick, and is

currently unavailable to those on medical card.

The copper ParaGard coil is a twelve year wonder. I am currently using it and am happy overall. No hormones, but it does make certain positions a bit painful. Doctors no longer fit them in Ireland, which is a pity because it is highly effective, is 100 hormone free, and requires no observation on the wearers part except to check that it's string is in place once in a while. It works by stopping the sperm from meeting the egg, by delaying the egg getting to the womb, or preventing an egg from settling in the womb. It is still available in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.

Diaphragms, spermicides, condoms are other non-hormonal ways of dodging babies. Abstinence - too is always an option, but very few of us choose that way thankfully. If you go into a GP in regard to controlling your reproduction today, you will get offered a collection of injections, implants, patches, vaginal rings, and pills. All well and good, but if you are like myself and can only cope with your own hormones it is essential to know that there are other ways out there, and GPs are not in the best position for dealing with reproductive rights.

I fear that I am coming across very dismissively of standard allopathic medicine, which is not the case, and I plead for a better medical system. A system where a woman or a couple can make an informed

decision in relation to their reproductive choices. A choice that fits their ethics, their bodily needs, their finances and their beliefs. A system where the individual is recognised.

Contraception is not discussed, and it is almost unacceptable to discuss how our birth control controls us. We need to be better educated as a society, but take responsibility as individuals also. GPs are costly and at times ill equipped. Family planning centres, such as IFPA, have doctors who specialise in birth control. There are natural centres such as ACCORD and NAOMI, but they are limited in number. Also, it is vital to remember that the medical industry, like others, is a dynamic industry, and practise varies. Online parenting discussion boards, such as rollercoaster.ie, with forums specifically dealing with contraceptives are a great resource.

There is room for hormonal, non-hormonal and natural methods of birth control within our society. Ireland is still revolutionising itself against the former hold of the Catholic Church upon our sexuality and reproduction, but let's not throw the baby out with the bath water. There is much to be said for placing natural methods alongside hormonal and non-hormonal contraceptives.

I would recommend keeping track and monitoring yourself whenever you start a new contraceptive. Note any positive or negatives

changes. Be aware what is in your contraception: Google the ingredients. Hop onto forums discussing contraception. Invest in a moon cup and you can see how different contraceptives alter your menstrual flow. Question your doctor: you are with yourself twenty-four hours a day - you know your body, your GP doesn't. The more information you can give about yourself, the better a position your GPs is in. It seems to be common practise amongst GPs to be dismissive of patients' questions, concerns, awareness of themselves. Do not be put off: your body is more important than a hyped up GP. A GP deals with snotty noses and rashes on a day-to-day basis. It has likely been a long time since they were at medical school: they are human, not infallible gods of the medical world. If you feel your one isn't listening to you or being supportive, change your doctor. Women use contraceptives for a huge portion of their lives, so it is important that it's done within a supportive

environment.

We need to inform ourselves and talk freely among ourselves about our bodies. We must get more in touch with our physical bodies, understand the rhythms and flows, that we are individuals and like that not every contraceptive suits everyone. Some people have fantastic experiences, some have negative, but we all need to be looked after and make our choices with the least amount of complications.

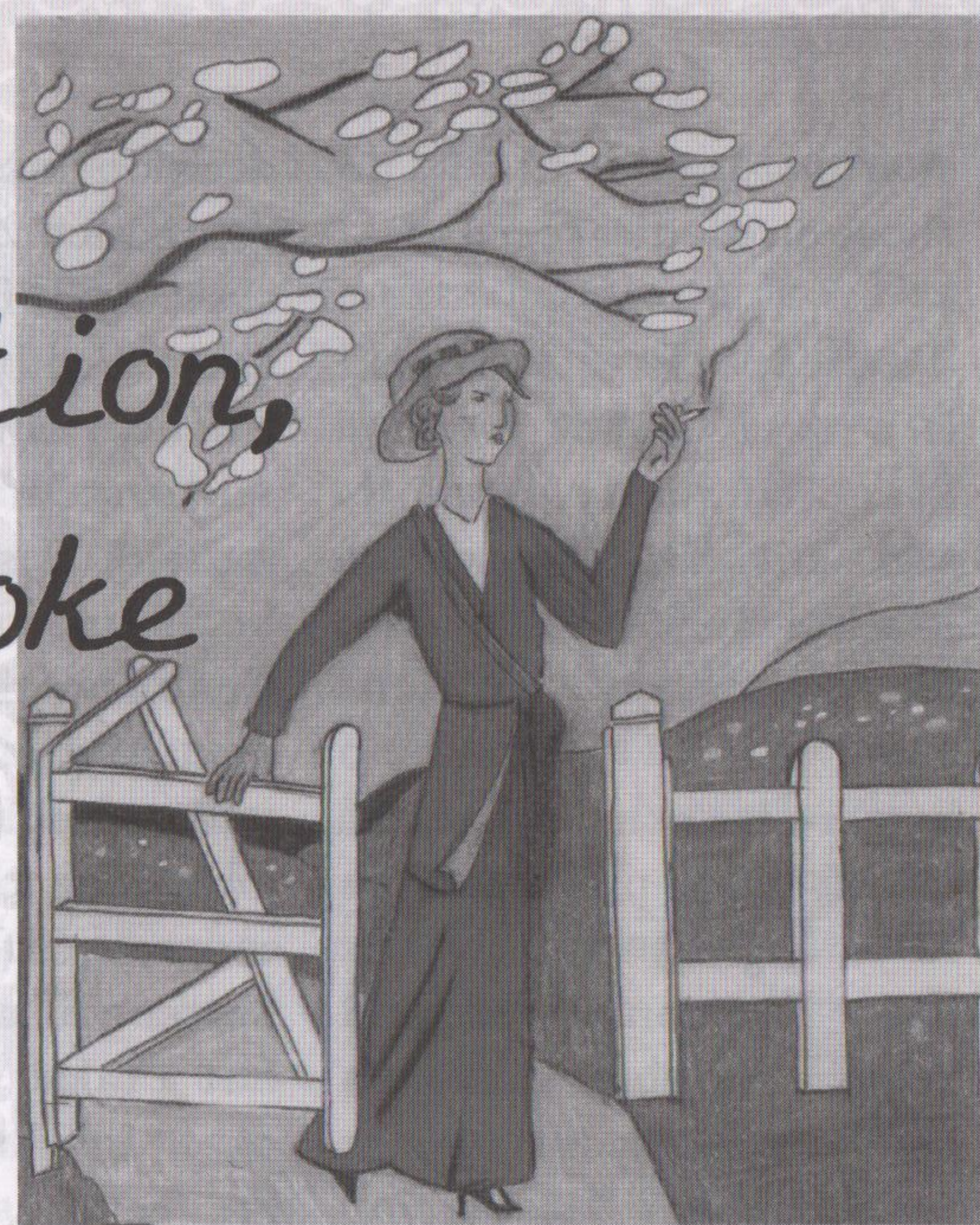
Revel and thoroughly enjoy the fact that women are no longer baby factories, that we as women and men can have sex how we please and with whom we please: we are no longer living in an era of religious oppression. Breeding continuously is not forced upon our sexuality. We can freely enjoy orgasms and strive for many more. However, let us push the boundary further and take control of our reproductive choices, thus gaining control of ourselves.





Our Emancipation, Up in Smoke

words by angela
images by michelle



Some of my earliest memories include riding in the back seat of my mom's Volvo while she smoked cigarettes with the window cracked. Both of her parents smoked, and four of her five siblings did, too. Despite the deaths of her parents to smoking-related diseases (emphysema and lung cancer), and warnings from her doctor and the media (not to mention the warning labels on the cigarette packs themselves), she still, at age 56, chooses to smoke.

At age 12, I was diagnosed with asthma. I can't help but think of all those suffocating car rides and wonder if my smoke-filled childhood environment isn't to blame. Still, it didn't stop me from taking up cigarettes myself, starting at age 14, and continuing off and on until I was nearly 30. Over the years the tobacco industry has come under fire for their targeting of teenage girls and women, and as I watch my mother smoke her micro-slim "Capri" brand cigarettes, I see first hand how effective their strategies have been. Recalling the frightening and horrific final days of my grand-parents, I ask my mom why she doesn't just quit. "I enjoy it," she responds, simply. She believes that since she only smokes three to five cigarettes per day that she's not doing much damage to her health with the habit. I desperately wish she were right.

Like many teenage girls, my mom had horrible self-esteem, made worse by the fact that she had a gorgeous, smart, and artistic older sister to measure herself against. By contrast, my mother had a childhood thyroid disorder and learning disabilities for which she was hassled constantly. The kids in the school yard, in reaction to the bulging eyes she exhibited as a result of her disease, taunted her with the nickname "Pop-eye," and she was told by her teachers that she was stupid. After her health recovered and she blossomed into a beautiful young woman

in the early 70s, she never fully shirked those labels. So began her battle with eating disorders and cigarette addiction. After giving birth to me, she insisted on having a smoke in her hands before her newborn baby. And I mean that literally.

What makes cigarette smoking so compelling? And given that so many men smoke – more men than women – is smoking a feminist issue? I think it is. And so do epidemiologists in Public Health studying gender inequalities. But to figure out why this is such an important issue, I had to try to discover why women smoke, both today and in history, who profits from it, and who pays the cost of female cigarette addiction.

I know that when I smoked my first cigarette, I felt powerful and rebellious. I said to myself, "I can do whatever I want." It was exciting to be (ostensibly) making my own choices. My parents couldn't tell me what to do! Ironically, as I was protesting my mother's rules, she naturally acted as my biggest role model. I felt so grown-up, smoking like the teenagers and adults I had been seeing my whole life. It didn't matter that it made my stomach turn and set off a fit of coughing. I practised until I got the hang of it. I definitely remember feeling "cool" when I learned to smoke because I thought it was a bad ass thing that only big kids did. I taught myself to smoke in my bedroom with cigarettes I stole from my mom. I didn't really become a regular smoker until mid-way through college, but that "naughty" feeling never went away. I remember driving away from my weekly psychiatrist appointments, ritualistically opening the windows and sun roof of my car and lighting up a smoke while driving home at breakneck speed, feeling like I was tough enough to do anything. And it's just this sort of feeling of female rebelliousness and empowerment that the tobacco

companies have been trying to associate with smoking for nearly a hundred years. Many studies of women and cigarette use have noted that early advertisements for cigarettes, in an attempt to reel in the female market, used taglines that would appeal to "emancipated women." As the BBC documentary series "Century of the Self," reports, cigarettes were given to marching suffragettes, thus aligning cigarettes with a lifestyle where you could have anything a man could have (even if it might kill you).¹ These kinds of techniques are far from a thing of the past, however. I informally asked some female smoker friends what brand of cigarettes they bought and was surprised at how many of them answered that they smoked Camel lights because that was the brand that the "cigarette fairies" passed out at bars and clubs. In the US, these promotional reps often walk around hanging out free packs of smokes to partiers over 18 with an ID.

It's impossible not to see the irony of advertisers creating a false need for women to take up a habit that is supposed to reflect their desire to be independent and equal, but in reality causes a disproportionately larger number of problems than solutions. If you thought cigarette smoking was cool



and glamorous, how do you feel about lung cancer (now the leading cause of death in women, surpassing breast cancer); low bone density; early menopause; coronary heart disease; and oropharynx, bladder, colorectal, pancreatic, and kidney cancer? (Just to name a few of the conditions smoking is a major cause of.) Then there's the problems it can create unique to women, like problems with pregnancy, complications with oral contraceptive use (those blood clot warnings are no joke), menstrual function, and cervical cancer. Women suffering from these afflictions would hardly call them emancipating.

According to an article in the journal Addiction, called, "Designing cigarettes for women: new findings from the tobacco industry documents," which investigated newly unveiled documents (accessible at <http://www.tobaccodocuments.org>), "A 1976 British-American Tobacco Company (BAT) review of gender differences (drawing on both internal and published studies) concluded that women were more motivated to smoke, smoked more for insecurity reasons and exhibited more neurotic traits." With more studies, they further concluded that women smoked when under stress vs. men who smoked to "relieve boredom and fatigue."² And as early as 1928, the industry tried to convince women that cigarettes were the ticket to a slim figure, with such slogans as "Reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet."³ I've personally heard women say that they are going to take up smoking in order to lose weight with the notion that it will speed up their metabolism.

However, the biggest reason the women I know have started smoking appears to be for social acceptance. When asked about it, female smokers I spoke to responded with such explanations as, "probably for the lame reason 'all my friends smoke its cool' kind thing," "I really wanted an excuse to leave class, and bumming smokes from the cute art boys gave me an excuse to chat them up," and "I had a very generous friend/roommate who started smoking and would usually just pull two out of his pack when he started smoking. I was also 19 and pretty much down with whatever my friends were doing." There is a camaraderie in being part of that group that hangs out in the front of the building, no matter what the weather, dragging on a butt. Smokers have remarked to me over the years that they would never have met a good portion of their friends if it weren't for smoking. It can be vital to a person's social life, not to mention the comfort one can find in the old "cigarette break" from work. But the tobacco companies know

all this, too. Their own studies identify the social appeal of smoking for women and teenage girls' need to look "more mature" as "an area of opportunity...which should be exploited."² Hence, longer, slimmer cigarettes were created, along with low-tar and flavoured products to appeal both to a woman's nurturing role and to her self-consciousness about smelling bad and having smoker's breath. It was thoughtful of them, wasn't it, to manufacture the supply for our demand, which they created? And since women have been shown to have a more difficult time quitting, we are a cash cow for the industry. I've wondered a lot about the millions of women who have started smoking in order to fit in, bond, make friends, and feel relaxed. I can't help but note the irony that the illnesses caused by smoking take every single one of those things away.

The great mystery, for me, as I researched this topic, has been study after study indicating the increased vulnerability of low-income and lesser educated women to cigarette addiction. It seems illogical that the people who can least afford not only the cigarettes themselves (which get more expensive each year), but the health problems they cause. The women with the fewest resources are most at risk. And you may think, with all the smoking bans being implemented worldwide, surely smoking rates have gone down. They have...in men. Overall, female smoking is on the rise, "driven by the growth of female markets in developing countries."³ Female smokers are expected to nearly triple by 2025. The Slán survey, commissioned by the Irish Dept of Public Health, showed that a disproportionate number of poor women smoke: "56% of women aged 18 to 29 in the lowest socio-

economic class are smokers compared with 28% of women in the same age group in the highest social classes." These women also most commonly suffered from depression.⁴ Nowadays, if a young woman is poor, she not only has a greater chance of lighting up, but she has a lower chance of ever quitting. Therefore disadvantaged women bear the burden of the illnesses that accompany the addiction.

In reality, rather than being a reflection of women's freedom and choice, tobacco use is an emblem of our objectification and victimisation. As a Bulletin for the World Health Organization put it, "Tobacco has been identified as a contributing factor in gender inequality and undermines the principle of women and children's right to health as a basic human right."³ Before you pick up that next pack of smokes, consider fighting for this right. Instead, spend your hard earned money on something that is actually good for you and the people who love you rather than putting it in the hands of those who seek to rob you of your health and happiness.

Endnotes:

- ¹The Century of the Self (part one). Curtis, Adam, dir. BBC, 2002.
- ²Carpenter, Carrie-Murray, et al. "Designing Cigarettes for Women: new findings from the tobacco industry documents." *Addiction*. 100 (2005): 837-851.
- ³Ernster, Virginia. "Women and tobacco: moving from policy to action." *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*. 78.8 (2002): 891-901.
- ⁴Donnellan, Eithne. "Trend bucked as percentage of smokers increases." *The Irish Times* 30 April 2008: 3.



Single Parenting Survival Guide

by Sheila

Single parents are a growing group. We come in many shapes, sizes and genders these days. I've been at it for four years now and have found it to be a massive voyage of universal and personal discovery. It's been hard, but we're still smiling and have a lifetime to go yet. These are a few things that have made my life easier, and I think as a lone parent its all about the making it easier.

House sharing is possible and fantastic for one-parent families: free babysitting, company, splitsee on bills, house cleaning, the works. It's cheaper for the government too – it is not encouraged or publicised on rent allowance, but wholly possible.

Don't buy crap because it is cheap. It will break, and it will look cheap because it is cheap. It will cost a lot more in the long run with replacements, repairs etc. Step away from the Argos catalogue! Save for good items or use recycle sites.

DIY projects, especially within a social centre scene, are fantastic. You meet lots of people, some who inevitably have kids. Alternative families are magnets for other alternative families.

Get all Social Welfare placed into your bank account. They will tell you you can't, but oh yes you can with a letter from a GP stating stress, anxiety, depression. It will save you a lot of freedom within the Social Welfare. They are petrified of mental health issues. You are doing a job: you are raising a kid. Most jobs get paid into their bank accounts. It makes life easier, and if you're not restrained by collecting from a post office you can visit friends down the country, bring the kid(s) on trips, go on holidays, go to college, sit at home scratching your bum, and not have to ask permission every time.

Credit Union standing order every week. It's money that hasn't touched your hands, so its not real money. That nest egg, however small, enables

you to do so much more – courses that aren't in a VEC scheme, holidays, maintaining a hobby, not continual hand-to-mouth survival.

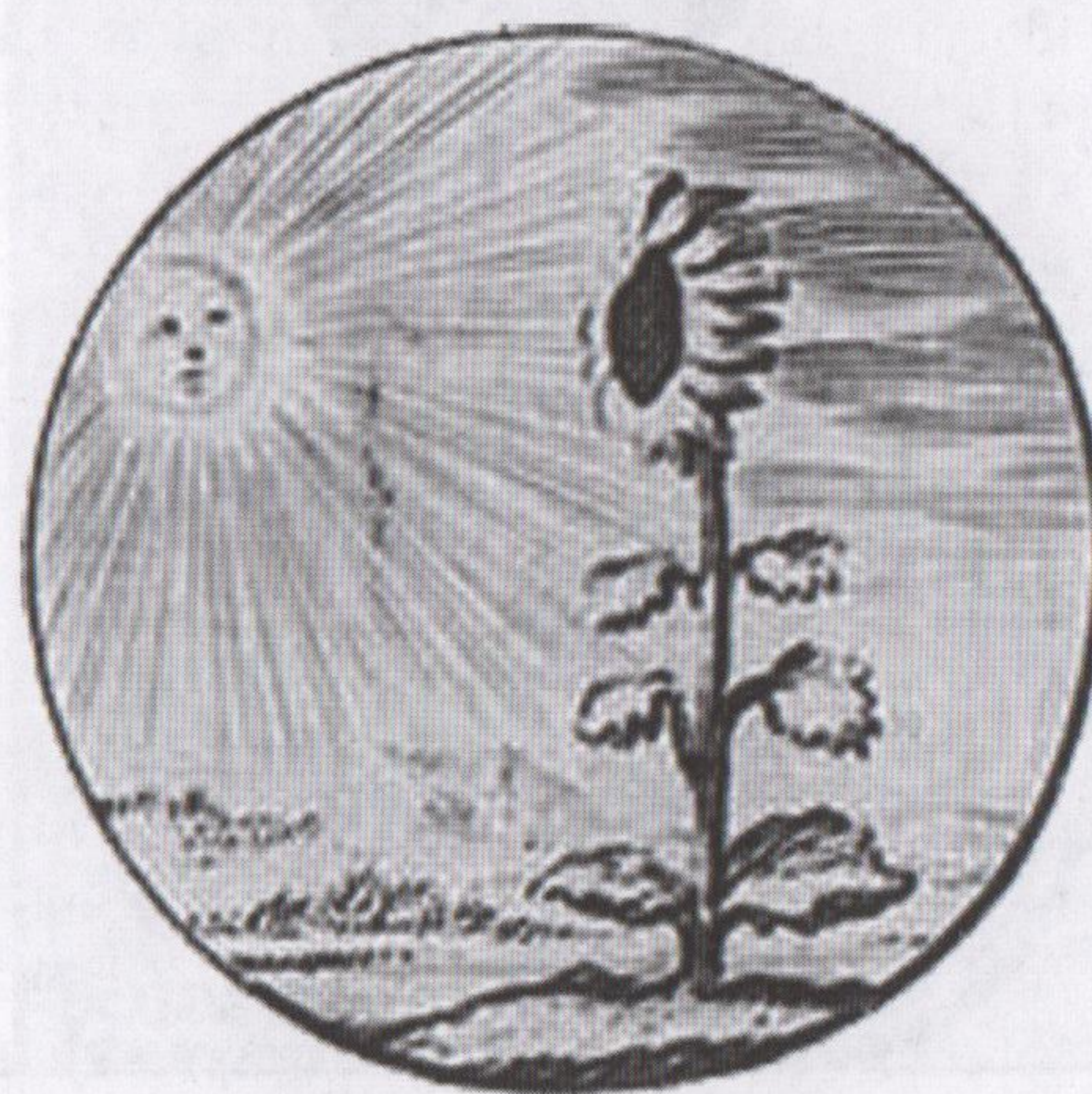
One parent online forums can be scary territory but if you need questions answering it's a good spot, especially on legal rights and entitlements. www.rollercoaster.ie has a very active forum.

Revel in the eco friendliness of poverty!! Can't afford Cillit, or some cleaning product, make your own, more fun, more effective and it's more so a lifestyle choice than a money issue.

Money is a big thing, the recession means more 'cash in hand jobs' which is very helpful when kids are teeny tiny. Postering is something that toddlers love to do for whatever reason. Coppers in the jar, training school hairdressers, charity shopping, altering your own clothes, hand-me-downs, gumtree, eBay – all good stuff to fill your days with, because parenting at times can be a bit dull.

Lidl and Marks & Spencers are your best friends – Lidl has fewer chemicals in their foods (I just wouldn't go touching their meat or cleaning products) and Marks & Spencers' cheap deals are amazing!!

Go on holidays. Just go to cheap places like eastern Europe and Morocco. Budget airlines, tents, it's all possible.



Charities. Use them; they are not like Angela's Ashes anymore. Some can be intrusive, but if the end justifies the means.... They offer education grants, vouchers at Christmas, have cheaper community-led childcare and more of a down to earth attitude.

Counselling. There is an odd attitude in Ireland surrounding anything to do with mental health, but counsellors that deal with lone parents on a regular basis are a great ally, for however short or long a period.

Bitch and moan. It is shit doing the job on your own and it is shit hard. Just remember unless people are doing it they won't get how extreme it can be or understand the greatness and liberation you can get from being a lone parent.

Let some of your values slide if it means you can get a night out or time to yourself. So what if Nanny lets Bobby watch crap, eat crap? He needs to see other ways of life and you need some 'you' time, so off the high horse and off you go.

Urban living. I've found living in a city much easier as a single parent than the suburbs – better amenities and maybe more mixed society, better parks and kids stuff doesn't cost the world. Though, it's not for everyone.

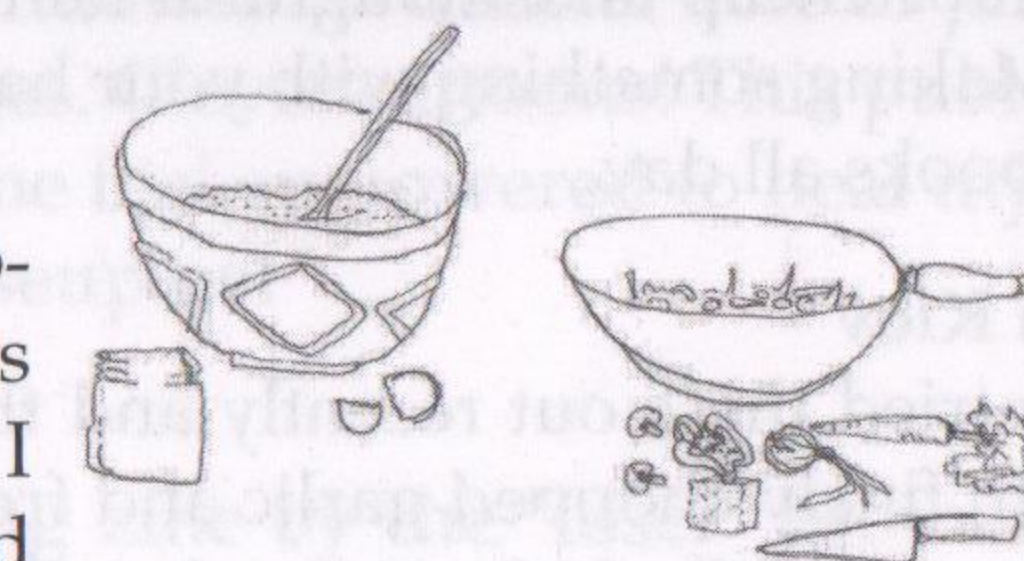
Other parents are all right to be friends with. They aren't all stuffy shites, some are really funky and worth your attention even if they are ten, fifteen years older than you. I steered clear of parents for three years and made life more difficult because of it.

Be honest with your kid, let them know at times you find parenting tough, that you used to be a person all to yourself, that you need space for yourself that you have other interests than them. They will get it eventually and be better people for it.

RAG Recommends

Niav recommends:

Become the new Nigella or Jamie courtesy of the BBC Food and Good Food Magazine websites. Have a look in your cupboards and fridge, enter what you've got into the ingredients search and it will give you lots of tasty recipes. These websites are a great resource and I wouldn't be eating so much delicious and healthy grub without them. www.bbc.co.uk/food and www.bbcgoodfood.com



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Aoife recommends:

Book: Occasions of Sin; Sex and Society in Modern Ireland by Diarmuid Ferriter. Looking at sources such as private letters, newspapers and with an extensive use of court records, Ferriter's social history spans 150 years of Irish sexuality, sex crimes and 'sin.' Exposing how the public and nationalistic discourses of so-called 'chaste' Ireland mars with the frequency of abuse, infanticide, illegal homosexual encounters (only male, of course) and even bestiality appearing in the courts. The language used and discourse concerning debates through the decades, such as the age of consent, illegitimacy and the rape of children is shocking and sometimes blackly humorous.

Book: The Spirit Level: Why Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickard. Based on 50 person years of research, this book uses an evidence-based approach to argue that equal societies (of 'developed' countries) have less social and public health problems. Academically rigorous, but completely readable and not a bit dry, this book aims to prove that equality is a good thing, not just

for the poor, but across the social spectrum. Stick it to ya, McDowell...

Bread-machine: Not exactly cheap, especially if you want one that's going to last, but it will actually work out cheaper in the long run if you make good use of it. Throw in a few ingredients, set the timer and wake up to the smell of fresh, organic, hot, unbleached bread, full of your favourite ingredients (green olives and sun-dried tomatoes recommended).

Clare recommends:

A Woman in Berlin, Anonymous. A diary kept by a woman living in Berlin at the close of WWII. Describes the harrowing struggle to stay alive, and throws light on the reality of rape as a weapon of war. When rape is inevitable the women do what they can to minimise the trauma. I'd highly recommend this book.

Petticoat Rebellion – The Anna Parnell Story, Patricia Groves Anna Parnell (1852-1911) and the Ladies Land League represent an interesting time in the history of women's organising in Ireland, too often overlooked. While at times the book reads a little like a college dissertation, it gives a good background and international context to the events, and paints a picture of a courageous woman and a fascinating organisation.

Holly recommends:

Swimmin' with the wimmin: One night by total accident, my friend and I came across a group of women stripping off, at midnight, to go for a swim. They seemed so unphased by the water temperature. Inspired, we decided to strip to our undies and follow them in. It was COLD but our bodies went numb after a minute. With the moon above us and the coast sparkling before us it was lovely! The women didn't stay in as long as us, but they waited for us to get out and sent a young fella over to us with towels and hot chocolate! Amazing! So, at midnight every second Sat for the full and new moon, Martello tower, Seapoint. Meet you there!

Angela recommends:

PoolBoy Magazine is an independent adult lifestyle magazine for badass women looking for hot guys and good reads. Porn for women who aren't afraid to educate, challenge, and indulge themselves. Created to help fill the gap between the sorry assortment of adult visual material available and what women really desire, PoolBoy is a magazine for feminist ladies who want to see sexy dudes in the buff. Inspired by the awesome NYC mag "Sweet Action" (RIP) the ladies behind Poolboy decided to go into the porn business and create a magazine featuring hot naked dudes along with interesting articles, features, interviews, reviews and more. They feature the type of dude you actually want to see naked: the cute nerd you saw at the library, the hot hipster from last night's show, the grad student you stare at in class. Forget the beefcakes, you want PoolBoy! Check out their blog for teasers: <http://poolboymagazine.blogspot.com>.

Jean recommends:

Taking up a hobby -

I know this sounds obvious but if I had not taken up new hobbies this year I would have lost the plot. Taking time to learn something new, whatever that may be, on your own terms is really good for your head. This year was pure stress for me as it was the final year of my degree. I took up playing the ukulele and making jewellery. Especially the jewellery making is really cheap because people often have stuff they don't use and you can take them apart and make new and beautiful things. It's also great for cheap and thoughtful handmade gifts. I found this especially good when I was studying a lot. Making something with your hands can be really therapeutic when you've been lost in your head and books all day.

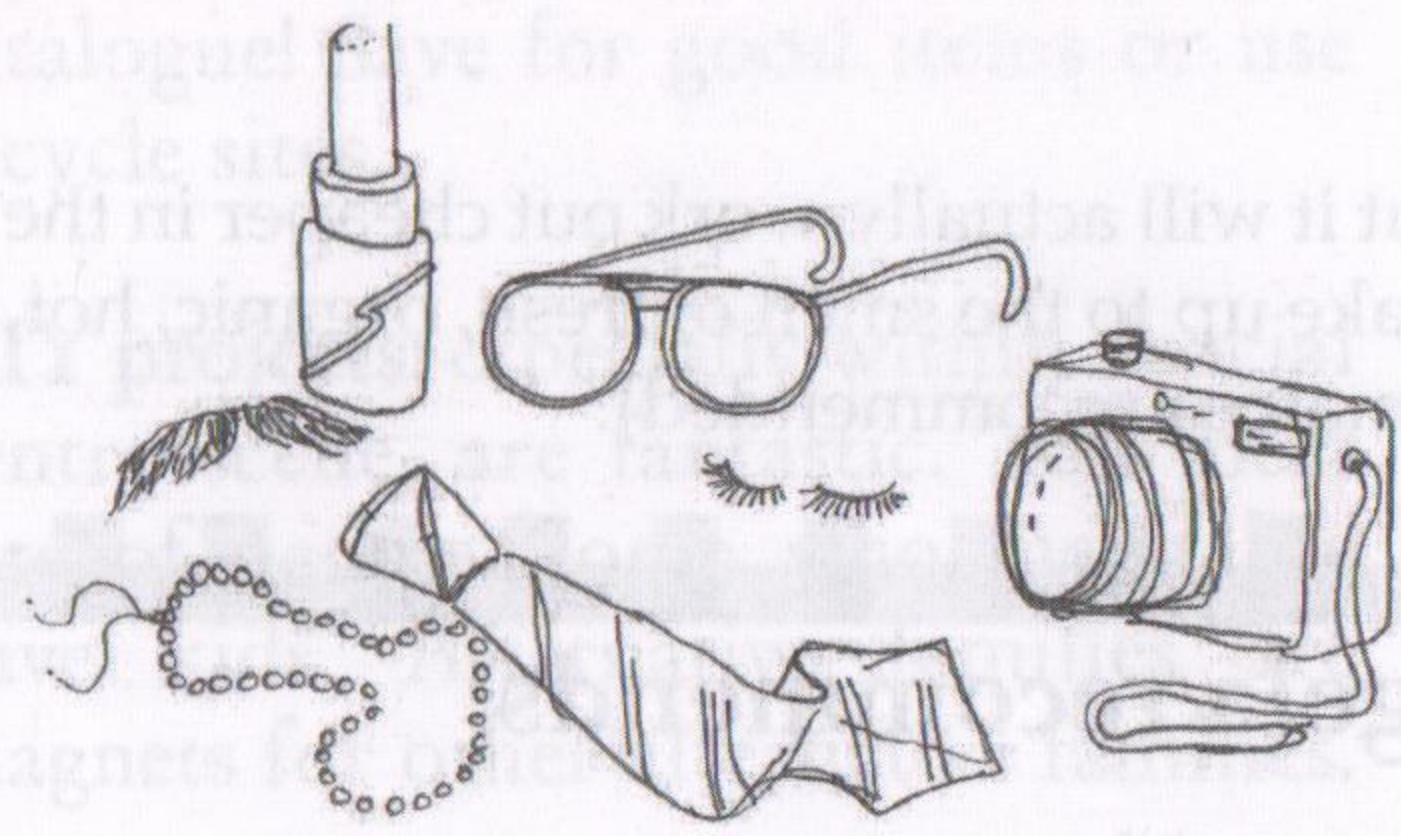
Bean Kiev -

I just tried these out recently and they're delicious! All you need to do is take some butter and mix it with finely chopped garlic and fresh parsley, or whatever fresh herb you like, wrap it in cling film and put it in the fridge to cool and go hard. Meanwhile, in one pan-fry some finely chopped veggies of your choice. In another pan heat and mash some kidney beans with a little butter and water. Then mix the veggies and the beans together. Make the mix into patties and inside each patty stick a ball of the garlic and herb butter. Dip each patty in a little beaten egg, cover with breadcrumbs and fry till nice and golden.

Emily recommends:

Dress-up photo shoots:

The ultimate in controversy for those on one's social networking sites who like to debate the 'authenticity' of your self-portraits! Someone once told me "Sorry, but photos lie". Liars! Damn lyin' photos! It cannot be argued however, that these best relief for rainy unemployed days, night-time, drunken-time, boring afternoons, and the best remedy for general restlessness is dress-up photoshoots. All one needs is clothes (a basket of especially considered clothes works best) and some form of camera. Mostly it's a bit of fun, but there have been times when things get arty, and I've seen how maleable my body and my identity is... lies? No darling, it's theeatahr! That is, theatre.



Short stories:

You know that reading-a-book feeling? When you fall asleep reading the book and you wake-up reaching for it again? When you long for your lunch break just to get another chapter under your belt, itching to delve back into whatever story it is you are journeying? Well, I've been longing for that feeling recently, but whatever book I happen to pick up, I can't seem to get tied up and addicted. A really, really good alternative, and one I have quickly come to favour is short stories. No surprise to be honest because Italo Calvino's Italian Folktales has been my favourite book since childhood. More recently, the following have been thumbed through with vigour! From wet-yer-knickers funny to dreadfully dramatic:

Transmorphism and other short stories by Boris Belony
The Bloody Chamber by Angela Carter
The Tent, Wilderness Tips and Good Bones By Margaret Atwood

Enjoy!

Hilary recommends:

Roasting peppers in the oven until they're nearly burnt, then eat.

Reading 'The dispossessed' by Ursula Le Guin - Recovering from a hangover by watching HBO dramas (Carnivale, The Wire, True Blood).

Revamping your wardrobe with a scissors, dye and a bit of imagination.

Recollecting fun times while trawling through your friends photos on facebook.

Rocking out to 1-Speed Bike!

Ariel recommends:

Rooibos tea: It's saved my life this year on more than one occasion, goes great with two spoons of sugar, and it smells like the tea my grandparents used to buy, not knowing it was anything other than 'regular' tea. The last is probably just a plus for me.

Queer and feminist porn: I'm late to the party in that I only discovered it this past year. Basically, it's pornography that aims to have all the hotness of sex and eroticism, while showing realistic sex and people with real bodies. Moreover, it's trans and queer without being titillation for the male gaze. The point is to empower the performers as well as to excite the audience (and make them laugh!). I particularly recommend Tour de Pants, The Crash Pad and Superfreak.

Pass books on: We're encouraged to keep everything that we love by a society of accumulation and consumption. Giving away books you love to a loved one who'll enjoy them will keep great knowledge going while making books into repositories of knowledge and not just products!



Sheila recommends:

Couscous - amazing hot or cold, cheap, healthy and a super quick dinner 1 cup of couscous to one cup of hot water, cover, sort your favourite veg courgette carrot, onion, garlic fried for me please, some spices, if you like squeeze of lemon, butter, oil or whatever you fancy. Mix it all together - fool proof. Excellent for making whilst hung-over and a delightful way to heal your body after a night out.

Hamмам - neighbourhood style, naked ladies from within the womb to old age, great way to appreciate women's bodies at every stage of life with no airbrushing and in every shape, size and condition. A much healthier and positive way of being surrounded by female folk, it is a weekly steam room style bathing ritual common in Morocco and throughout the Arab/Muslim world.

Aromatherapy - such a huge area with so many possibilities, health maintenance, personal hygiene, cleaning products, first aid, increased immunities, perfumes, kids products, massages. Even a small kit would get you far, lots of resources online and books out there. Its so much fun to make your own products that are better quality than the mass manufactured mislabelled shite on our shelves claiming to contain essential oils (and boo to the EU for letting that be possible).

Good world shopping guide - excellent book that's not preachy and that contains ethical ratings for thousands of companies and their products making ethical consumerism easier and more accessible.

Shonagh recommends:

Mooncups: (aka The Keeper) - Well worth the initial outlay of between 20 and 30 quid, these are little insertable soft rubber cups to catch menstrual blood. You just tip the blood down the toilet a few times a day. You can rinse them out under the tap - or with a squirty bottle of water if you're in a public loo. Boil to sterilise between periods. Et voila; no more bleached cotton next to your cervix. I recommend cutting the end of the tail off (the catchy bit that ends up sticking into your lips when cycling). Available from the RAG distro, online or in some chemists.



Christina recommends:

Squatting: Not what you'd think in an anarchist publication - but a simple toilet habit that has changed my life. At least 25% of pregnant women suffer from haemorrhoids, and at least 50% of everyone will eventually in their lives. By 25 I was pretty upset at being laid up in bed regularly unable to walk with the pain. After a while nothing worked; topical, pharmaceutical, herbal, dietary... there is even a high recurrence rate after curative operations. Take it from someone who knows: the only thing that works to eliminate piles and to keep them away is squatting to poo. It's not an easy manoeuvre on our western toilets. But it works. And it has opened my eyes to how incredibly limited our health care systems are. This simple technique could make a living hell better for so many people, yet it is unknown, unheard of in medical textbooks or research databases. Much of this is due to structural and cultural restraints; even if they know of the benefits, medical professionals cannot instruct you to balance precariously on your toilet bowl every time you take a shit because it is, plainly, risky. Yet (with apologies to less-agile sufferers) this is a risk I am only too happy to take.



Eve recommends: The writing of Audre Lorde

Growing up Black and Lesbian in sexist racist America, poet Audre Lorde has a few things to say about misogyny, racism, homophobia and the links that bind them together. I fell in love with her in *Zami: a new spelling of my name*. In rooted, honest prose she tells the story of her childhood as the daughter of Caribbean immigrants in New York during the thirties. The auto-mytho-biography charts her relationship with her family, her negotiations of a racist education system, moving out of home, falling in love (many times) and the transformative experience of a visit to Mexico aged 19. In *Sister Outsider*, a book of nine essays and speeches, Lorde covers topics ranging from the US backed coup in her mother's Grenada, to racism and homophobia within the women's movement. In 'Poetry Is Not a Luxury' she lays out the importance of creativity and intuition in the daily lives of women and in 'Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference' she underlines the importance of acknowledging and honouring difference between women. Reading Audre's words is like listening to the Black dyke feminist aunt I never had.

Marianne recommends: Breakfasty muffins

I got a non-vegan version of this recipe from a friend and have been making millions the last few months, The vegan version of the recipe is - 1 cup of flour, one cup of wheat bran, a teaspoon or so of baking powder, mixed spice, some hazelnuts (I crush them up in a mortar and pestle a bit first), some raisins, and an apple chopped up in chunks. Mix these together. In a measuring jug put 100mls of oil (or a bit less if you like), one banana mashed up with a bit of soya milk, and three big spoons of vegan yoghurt (easy to make yourself), maybe a little vanilla if you have it. Mix wet ingredients in with dry ones, if it's too dry add a bit more yoghurt. Spoon into cupcake holder thingies and bake at 180°C for 30 mins or so. Try to leave to cool before eating...I've added plums, chocolate, blackberries depending what's lying around and they're always good so experiment! (The non-vegan version just involved 2 eggs instead of the banana and yoghurt instead of vegan yoghurt but I found the vegan version nicer!)

Clodagh recommends:

Zines such as...

CHICKWEED

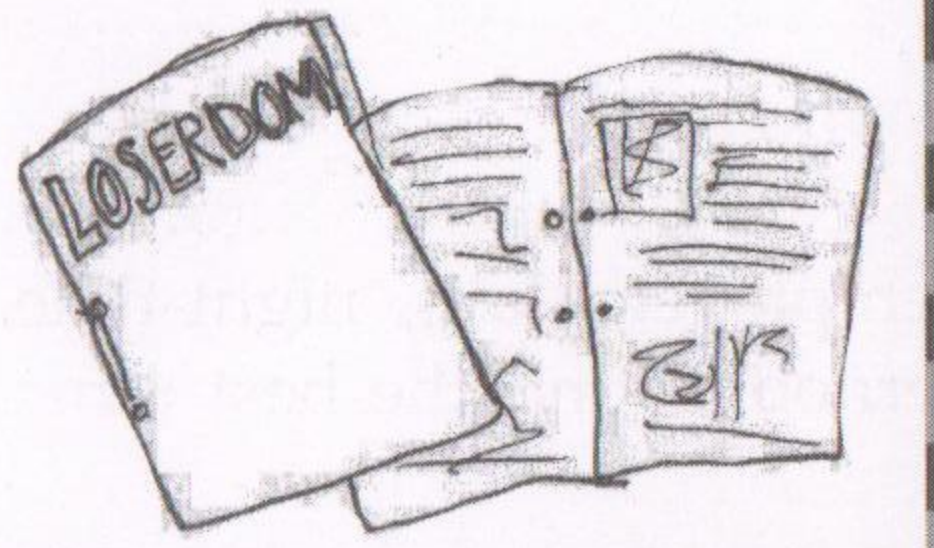
Excellent introduction to herbalism from an anarchy-feminist perspective. Easy to follow advice for growing and harvesting whether you have a windowsill, a quarter acre or just access to hedges. Clever cartoons! This publication made me feel empowered to heal myself. Lafk @ riseup.net

LOSERDOM

A long running zine by the "loser" brothers of the DIY punk community in Dublin which has a format of cartoons, travel tales, interviews, politics and more. loserdomzineATgmail.com

THIS FRANTIC SILENCE

A collection of writings relating to mental health that everyone should read ... and discuss ... experiences, opinions, advice from different perspectives on various elements of mental health/depression. direwolfATriseup.net



Deirdre recommends:

Delila - jinen azad - on YouTube

Delila was a Kurdish female guerrilla fighter and popular singer who was killed when the camp she was in in Iraq was attacked by the Turkish army in August 2007.

The song on YouTube, jinen azad (or se jinen azad), is beautiful. The video features Delila singing and in the background there's footage of female Kurdish guerrilla fighters. I find the song and images very empowering and moving. Simply dressed (actually in guerrilla fatigues) she seems such a stronger role model than many of the big-name female singers and performers that grace our screens.